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Faculty of Management

**CONSUMERS' PURSUIT OF UNIQUENESS IN ONLINE
FASHION CONSUMPTION**

Business Competence

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ABSTRACT

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The theory of uniqueness and need for uniqueness (NU) have had considerable influence on consumers' consumption behaviours. Depending on individual differences, consumers perceive NU differently and behave correspondingly. While the research phenomenon has been studied widely in the context of traditional fashion consumption, minimal analysis has been done to investigate consumption behaviour in the online environment. The purpose of this research is to understand consumer uniqueness-seeking behaviours undertaken online by exploring their motivations for engaging in online fashion shopping, perspective of NU, and manifestation of NU. To address the determined research purpose, the author adopts the interpretive approach to examine consumers' perception and experiences of performing certain uniqueness-seeking behaviours online to assure their status of uniqueness. Semi-structured and in-depth interviews have been conducted to collect empirical data to answer the complementary research questions. Derived from the result, consumers are driven online by various factors, including convenience, product availability, price along with others. Throughout the study, consumers classify themselves into groups that share similar degree of NU. Those with similar degree of concern for uniqueness share similar perceptions and exhibitions of NU categorised into three dimensions, namely creative choice and unpopular choice counter-conformity, and avoidance of similarity. The findings might contribute beneficial insights for fashion businesses to better satisfy consumers with diversified NU as targeted market.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Consumers' striving for uniqueness

To feel socially connected is an omnipresent human need. According to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, belonging is one of the essential needs of human being and individual's survival. In order to satisfy the desire to be part of a group, individuals tend to adjust their behaviours for conformity and protect themselves from social isolation. However, humans also strive for being special, particularly remarkable or indeed one of a kind in comparison to relevant others. Such motivation is encouraged by the need for uniqueness (NU) presumed as a stable and universal personality trait (Burns and Brady, 1992). Snyder and Fromkin's (1977, 1980) theory of uniqueness suggests that to maintain one's identity, individuals have tendency to seek for distinctiveness to avoid excessive similarities and/or dissimilarities to their peers, which are likely to be negatively interpreted. Brewer (1991) proposes that the most positive emotional outcome derives from a moderate degree of uniqueness. Alongside with the theory of uniqueness, Snyder and Fromkin (1977) introduce the uniqueness scale suggesting that individuals with high score on the scale are more likely to affiliate with unique groups. The degree of NU varies from one person to another. Consumers with different degree of NU carry different perspective on similarity or dissimilarity in comparison to others. One might assert high desirous of specialness while another resides at the opposite end of the spectrum. The individual-difference variable has significant impact on consumers' pursuit of uniqueness through consumption. (Lynn and Harris, 1997.)

In respect of the idea of individual differences, Lynn and Harris (1997) propose a new scale for measuring differences of individuals in their desire for unique consumer products (DUCP). The eight-item scale stresses on the motives that encourage consumers to strive for unique consumer products. On the other hand, the theory of consumers' need for uniqueness (CNFU) studies consumers' pursuit of uniqueness through consumption practices in a more general approach (Tian et al., 2001). CNFU has been measured with a 31-item scale along three behavioural dimensions: creative choice and unpopular choice counter-conformity, and avoidance of similarity (Tian et al., 2001; Tian and McKenzie,

2001). Nevertheless, in consideration of the need for a briefer scale to shorten monotony and costs, and avoid response bias (Drolet and Morrison, 2001) and redundancy between closely relevant items, Ruvio et al. (2008) propose a short-form scale studying CNFU.

Perceptions and manifestations of uniqueness vary from non-economic to consumer domains (Mathew, 2016). Non-economic attributes of uniqueness include physical, informational, and experiential characteristics (Fromkin, 1986; Snyder and Fromkin, 1980). On the other hand, consumer domain of uniqueness involves consumer behaviours and material possessions (Belk, 1985; 1988). According to Lynn and Snyder (2002), consumer products and behaviours are one of the major sources of sense of uniqueness. Following the works of Snyder and Fromkin (1977, 1980), the adoption of the uniqueness theory in consumer behaviour studies has matured significantly and has become an intriguing research phenomenon.

NU and CNFU have considerable influence on consumer behaviour. There is an unambiguous relationship between NU and consumer decision-making. When asked to reason their purchase decisions, especially unconventional preferences, consumers unaltered by social evaluation pressures express their NU that advocates their deviation from social norms (Simonson and Nowlis, 2000). Moreover, high-uniqueness consumers are more hesitant to generate positive word-of-mouth (WOM) recommendations for the products they own. Due to the persuasive quality of WOM recommendation, consumers with high NU are sceptical to recommend products to others as it might threaten their differentness. Yet, they are more willing to offer WOM containing only product details to certain extent. (Cheema and Kaikati, 2010.) Uniqueness-driven consumers also exhibit higher intention to switch brands in comparison to the low-uniqueness. Yet, taking into consideration of brand personality variable, consumers with higher uniqueness score are less likely to show brand switching intention towards strong brand personality products. (Kao, 2013.) Brand personality refers to the human characteristics (Aaker, 1997) and symbolic meaning (Guthrie et al., 2008) associated with a specific brand. On the subject of consumer behaviour, Tseng and Balabanis (2017) disclose that CNFU has a considerable role in governing typicality effects. Typicality reflects the representativeness of a product of a category, or of a country. Consumers with high-uniqueness trait display high purchase intentions towards atypical products than typical ones. (Tseng and Balabanis, 2017.) In addition to the impact on behaviour, NU scale also contributes to the

characterisation of, for instance, fashion consumer groups (Workman and Kidd, 2000). As abovementioned, the exhibitions of NU or CNFU are beyond the consumption of consumer products, for instance, interpersonal actions (Maslach et al., 1985), domain of knowledge and expertise (Holt, 1995), or beliefs (Snyder, 1992). In terms of beliefs, conspiracy theories appear to have certain connection to NU considering the potential possession of unconventional and conceivably scarce information represented by the theories (Lantian et al., 2017). Similarly, according to Hyun and Park (2016), consumer experience of services, such as hospitality and tourism services, also serves as another expression of CNFU.

1.2. Research gap

Among the vast amount of studies on NU in various areas, fashion industry emerges as one of the prominent research contexts. The concept of fashion is extensively defined as “any specific form of attire, art, form of behaviour and perception” (Fang et al., 2012, p. 85). Alongside with other traits of fashion, it features the pursuit of uniformity and class distinction at the same time that satisfies the harmonisation of the indispensable need for belonging and differentness simultaneously (Fang et al., 2012). There are manifold approaches to generate feelings of uniqueness, for instance, displaying of possessions, expressing unconventional consumption behaviour, or opposing to the majority views. Fashion simplifies the display of possessions as the exhibition of CNFU. Material possessions and magnitude of the connections between consumers and those possessions have come to serve as the key symbols identifying their identity (Dittmar, 1992). Thus, consumption and display of possessions in the context of fashion are typical approaches to gain the uniqueness feelings (Veblen, 1997). Researches also report the significance of NU and CNFU on consumers’ affection towards scarce and luxury products. Desire for scarce products is one of the most vivid reactions following high NU (Lynn, 1991). Similar conclusions have been made in support of the thought (e.g. Snyder, 1992; Latter et al., 2010; Aydin, 2016). Innovative behaviour and customisation of products are other manifestations of uniqueness-seeking motivation (Lynn and Harris, 1997). Although considerable scholars have been considerably dedicated to appreciating consumers’ striving for uniqueness in fashion through behavioural manifestations, most of the

researches occupy the offline environment while the online environment has not received appropriate treatment.

Understanding the research phenomenon in the context of fashion consumption in the online environment is important in various aspects. Firstly, individuals behave differently regarding the context (Gerome, 2016). Supporting this notion, Aiken (2016) mentions in her publication “The Cyber Effect” that the Internet stimulates consumers to behave in unconventional manners, for example, being more trusting, altruistic, or adventurous. Studies have also documented the transformation of consumption behaviour; for instance, consumers are more brand and size loyal and less price conscious online (Chu et al., 2010). Respectively, it is reasonable to speculate that consumers might pursue uniqueness through consumption differently online. Secondly, consumers worldwide are progressively migrating from brick-and-mortar and traditional shops to online stores (Vijay and Balaji, 2009) and adopting the online environment as a shopping channel. Online shopping can be described as an act of ordering and acquiring products via Internet-based outlets that facilitates consumer-buying process with accessibility to product and price information, and product comparison without any intermediary services (Chu et al., 2010; Demangeot and Broderick, 2007). According to a research of KPMG (2017), consumers prefer buying online over going to physical shops due to time flexibility (ability to shop 24/7) and cost savings by the possibility to effortlessly compare and get better prices. Additionally, consumers prefer shopping online to refrain themselves from encountering negative experiences when shopping traditionally. Consumers seek for online shopping as a solution for travelling to and from stores to stores, crowd and checkout lines avoidance, and approachability to products that are unavailable locally. (KPMG, 2017.) Hence, studying the phenomenon in online fashion shopping context should provide a more thorough comprehension of consumer behaviour in both tradition and online settings.

NU is one of personality traits which is stable (Burns and Brady, 1992) that has seized much scholars’ attention (e.g. Lynn and Harris 1997; Snyder and Fromkin 1977, 1980; Tian et al., 2001). Consumers’ personality traits contribute to the description of market segments (Engel et al., 1995). This makes consumers with high NU a promising market segment, and a complete understanding of the segment in terms of consumption behaviour critical.

1.3. Research purpose and questions

This study therefore set out to fill the gap of understanding consumer uniqueness-seeking behaviour in the context of fashion consumption in the online environment. To achieve this purpose, three complementary research questions are addressed:

1. What are consumers' motivations to engage in shopping in online environment?
2. What are consumers' perceptions of uniqueness?
3. What are strategies or tactics consumers use to ensure their uniqueness through consumption of fashion products in the context of online environment?

To discuss the research questions, the research follows the below structure:

The main issues addressed in this paper are consumer motives for online and fashion shopping, and CNFU as drivers for manifested behaviours to achieve and assure uniqueness with regard to fashion. This thesis first gives a brief overview of the recent studies of consumers' striving for uniqueness as a research phenomenon and classify the current gap to position the research topic. The second chapter begins by laying out the current shape of online fashion industry, and looks at how motivational dimensions encourage consumers to engage in online shopping for fashion items. Following is the concern of the key concepts, features, and manifestations of CNFU as a theoretical background to study the research phenomenon. Chapter Four rationalises the employment of research methodology to resolve the research questions. The fifth section presents and discusses research findings of online fashion shopping motivations and manifestations of NU of consumers in accordance with the theoretical framework. Lastly, the final chapter briefs the main findings followed by research limitations and suggestions for further studies.

2. MOTIVATION FOR ONLINE FASHION SHOPPING

2.1. Online fashion industry

Generally, in 2014, value of global online retail reached \$986.7 billion, and was expected to reach \$2041.7 billion by 2019. Of all the product categories, fashion product segment, such as, apparel, accessories, and footwear, comprised of 19.1 percent of the total value with the share of approximately \$188.4 billion. According to a report of Fashionbi (2015), the contribution made it the second largest purchase segment following electronics products. In the meantime, global market size of fashion online retail grew by three percent in 2014; increase the total segment value to \$1317.3 billion. The value of online retail segment of fashion consisted of \$650.7 billion (49.4 percent) of womenswear, followed by \$438 billion (33.2 percent) of menswear, and \$228.6 billion (17.4 percent) of children wear segments. By 2019, online fashion market size was predicted to reach \$1651.6 billion with the increase of 25.4 percent. (Fashionbi, 2015.)

A study of PwC conducted in 2017 revealed that 52 percent of more than 24,000 consumers in 29 territories were willing to conduct prior to purchase researches for fashion products online, and 40 percent of the global shoppers preferred to purchase clothing and footwear from online retailers. Internationally, 28 percent of surveyed consumers bought all or most of their clothing and footwear products online during the year. (PwC, 2017a.) However, it is reported that there is apprehension towards “differentiated products”, in this case, branded or luxury fashion apparel, due to consumers’ need to actually browse, examine or indeed seek for advice about the products (PwC, 2017b).

Consumer attitudes vary towards product categories offered in the Internet environment. Products or services that require minimum prior to purchase interaction, such as feel, try, smell, or touch, are more suitable for online context. Consumers are more confident and motivated in buying such products (e.g. CDs and books) and services (e.g. air tickets) (Monuwe et al., 2004; Sahney et al., 2014) than acquiring, for instance, luxury goods, consumer packaged products, and food and groceries from online retailers (Sands, 2016). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that consumers are sceptical when making purchase online for clothing and apparel products.

2.2. Motivation for online shopping

Motivation refers to the triggered state of an individual stimulated by needs, urges, desires, and wishes resulting in goal-directed behaviours (Mowen and Minor, 1998). Consumer motivation for shopping in online context has been widely studied. Sheth (1983) classifies the motives driving consumer engagement in online shopping into two fold, namely functional and non-functional or emotional dimensions. Functional aspects of online shopping refer to convenience, product and price diversity and accessibility as dominant motives (Sheth, 1983). On the other hand, non-functional aspects associate with consumers' personal and social motives (Eastlick and Feinberg, 1999; Parsons, 2002). Studies have reported cases where consumers prefer to shop on the Internet because of the involved fun, pleasure and excitement experiences (e.g. Bloch and Richins, 1983; Childers et al., 2001; Parsons, 2002). Enjoyment feelings emerge from online shopping experience contribute to consumers' positive attitude towards online shopping and their acceptance of the Internet as a shopping channel (Sahney et al., 2014). Rohm and Swaminathan (2004) identify the motivations in accordance with consumer typologies, such as online convenience (convenience shoppers), physical outlet orientation (variety seekers), information in planning and shopping (balanced buyers), and variety seeking in the context of online shopping (store oriented shoppers). The sense of convenience appears to be the most fascinating motivation among them all (Swaminathan et al., 1999). In addition, motivations for online shopping are also categorised into merchandise, assurance, convenience and hassle reduction, enjoyment, pragmatic, and responsiveness motivations (Rajamma et al., 2007).

Sahney et al. (2013) propose a multi-dimensional framework that outline factors that drive consumers to engage in online shopping. The model studies the factors under different contexts and environments, and conceptualises the motivations as pragmatic, product, economic, service excellence, social, demographic and situational motivations (Figure 1).

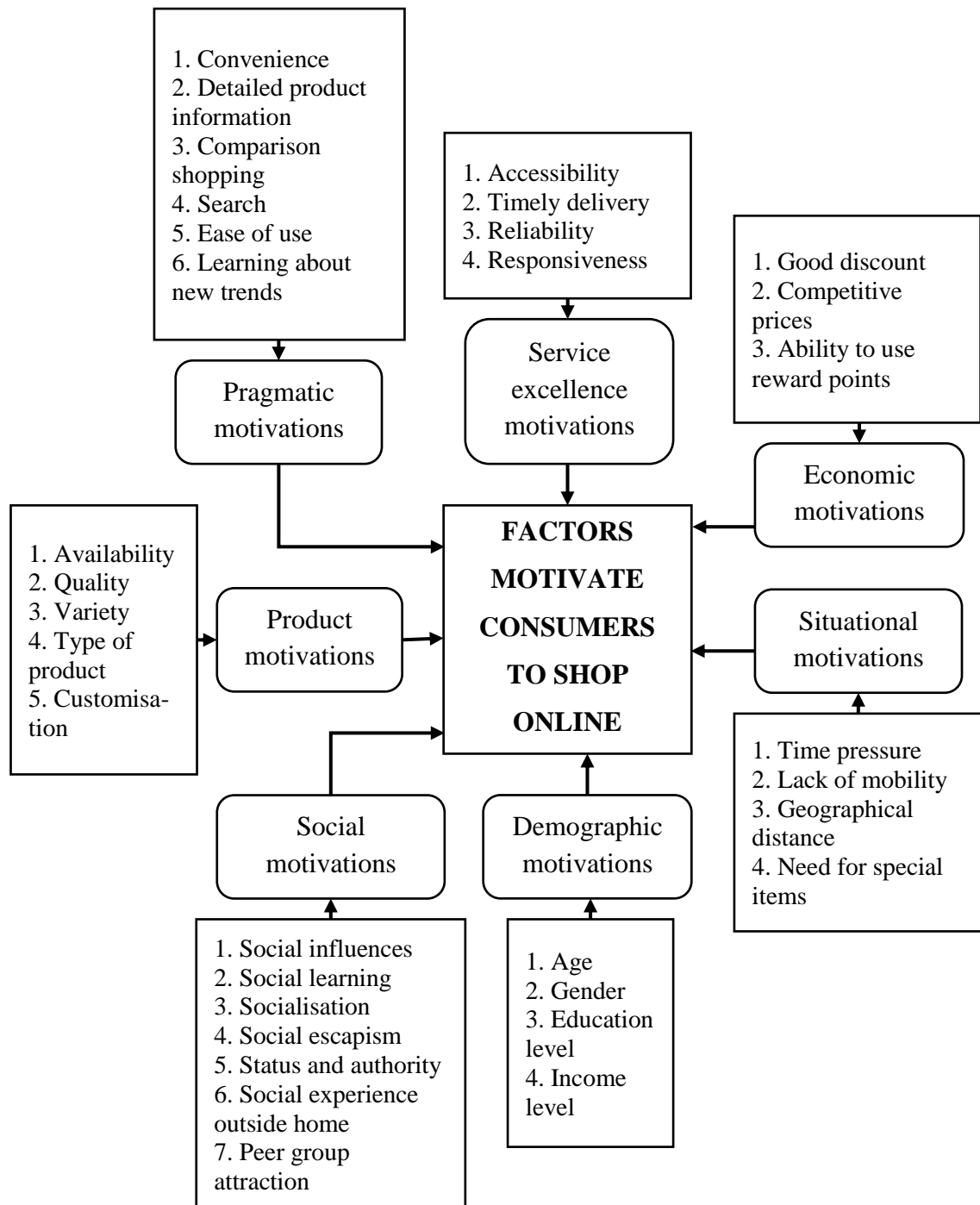


Figure 1. Consumer motivations for online shopping (Sahney et al., 2014)

Pragmatic motivations. Convenience plays a major role in motivating consumers to shop online (Swaminathan et al., 1999). The term convenience carries different aspects, including convenience of time, place, and the purchase process (Nielson, 1999; Foucault and Scheufele, 2002; Alreck and Settle, 2002). With regard to time flexibility, most online shopping channels provide 24-hour accessibility to purchase opportunity and customer

service (Bramall et al., 2004). Besides the enhancement of flexibility in respect of time and place, shopping online allows consumers to enjoy shopping experience fully without pressure to purchase (Sahney et al., 2014). Studies have confirmed that convenience-driven consumers have high tendency to shop and make purchases online (Swaminathan et al., 1999; Bhatnagar et al., 2000).

According to Sorce et al. (2005), the Internet stores detailed information needed for pre-purchase activities. Information positively have influence on consumer motivation in the online context (Korgaonkar and Wolin, 1999; Joines et al., 2003) especially in service industries (Rajamma et al., 2007). The impact of information motivation is as well remarkable regarding activities of searching for product information and making comparisons (Korgaonkar and Wolin, 1999; Joines et al., 2003). The enormous amount of information available on the Internet eases consumer decision-making process, as a majority of information required to make decision are online (Furnham, 2007; as cited in UK Essay, 2013). Consumers are also able to keep up with new trends since detailed information of products are accessible internationally (Sahney et al., 2004). In addition to product information, the available of a wide variety of product facilitates comparison-shopping. Online shopping empowers consumers to compare different brands and/or products variants, features and prices with a click of a mouse (Alba et al., 1997; Shankar et al., 2003).

Furthermore, ease of use, which implies easy purchase process and minimum effort required, motivates consumers to shop online (Sahney et al., 2014). The Technology Acceptance Model states that consumers are more likely to use online technology if the technology is uncomplicated and useful (Davis et al., 1989; Dabholkar, 1996; Monsuwe et al., 2004). Ease of use associates with consumers' experience with the technology and/or site characteristics, such as navigation and search functions (Sahney et al., 2014).

Another trait of online shopping that encourages consumers to shop online is hassle reduction motivation, or in other words, the motivation of engaging in trouble free shopping activities (e.g. Burke, 2002; Foucault and Scheufele, 2002; Rajamma et al., 2007). By shopping online, consumers might avoid dressing up to go out, driving, traffic jams, crowd, and transporting purchased products home from outlets (Sahney et al., 2014).

Product motivations. Aforementioned, product availability that is unavailable from local or brick-and-mortar shops drives consumers online. Aside from the availability of products, product quality and wide range of variety play an important role in inspiring consumers to shop online (Rajamma et al., 2007). Another dimension of product motivation is the possibility to have products customised, such as cards, personal computers, and clothing apparel and accessories (Sahney et al., 2014).

The Internet offers a platform for interactivity that not only satisfies consumers' needs or desires (Bezjian-Avery et al., 1998); yet provide interactive control that enhances web use experience (Korgaonkar and Wolin, 1999). Interactive control, which has correlation with time spent and purchase made online (Joines et al., 2003), provide consumers with control over what they want to view on the Internet (Korgaonkar and Wolin, 1999).

Economic motivations. Similar to shopping offline, competitive prices and discounts have phenomenal impact on consumer motivation to shop online. Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999) also report the relationship between economic motivations and time spent and purchase made online. Opportunities to purchase products at the best prices trigger consumers when shopping online. Craver (2006; as cited in UK Essays, 2013) declares that consumers are more likely to purchase online if bargains are offered online versus in retail stores. Hence, consumers expect prices offered online are lower than in physical outlets (UK Essays, 2013). Additionally, free shipping of products and everyday deals increase consumers' interest in online shopping (Hajewski, 2006; as cited in UK Essays, 2013). Besides, it is cost effective to make comparisons in terms of price, quality, delivery, discount offered, and reward points earned, et cetera (Rajamma et al., 2007).

Service excellence motivations. Consumers' approval of delivered promises regarding timely delivery, price, and product condition determine service excellence (Sahney et al., 2014). That makes it consumer perception based (Monuwe et al., 2014) and motivations for online shopping (Sahney et al., 2014). In addition, accessibility is another important dimension of service excellence motivations. It indicates ease of access to product and information regarding price, features, and terms of delivery when browsing and shop on the Internet. Service excellence motivations also include reliability aspects, namely, clearly stated freight or product charges, non-errors in processing, or receipt of products in proper condition. (Sahney et al., 2014.) Rajamma et al. (2007) report that consumers are

more likely to adopt online shopping as long as purchased merchandises are quickly delivered and are in good condition. Furthermore, it is crucial that consumers experience responsive and constructive interactions with retailers, which benefits the relationship between consumers and retailers (Sahney et al., 2014), and consumer motivation to shop online (Rajamma et al., 2014).

Demographic motivations. Consumer online behaviours are subject to the influence of demographic measurements including gender, age, income level, and educational level (Foucault and Scheufele, 2002). Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999) reveal that education and income levels associates with web usage, while gender and age relates to online shopping tendency. Monsuwe et al. (2004) suggest that young adults enjoy online shopping and the associated enjoyment, while older consumers measure the advantages of online shopping against required cost to learn new technology.

Social motivations. It is notable that social influence, such as supportive environment, perceived norms, or impact from significant ones affects consumer decision to shop online (Limayem et al., 2000; Kraut et al., 1996). It is debatable that social learning has influence on consumption behaviours in the online context (Sahney et al., 2014). Yet Foucault and Scheufele (2002) suggest that consumers might learn about online retailers through social learning, hence are more inclined in shopping online. Likewise, the degrees of influence of social escapism on online shopping is questionable (Joines et al., 2003) even though Korgaonkar and Wolin's (1999) study confirms the relationship between the variables. However, online shopping does provide opportunities to socialise (Korgaonkar and Wolin, 1999; Joines et al., 2003) and obtain status, feelings of being important, and respect from others by being member of desired virtual communities (Sahney et al., 2014). Socialisation implies interaction and contact though interactive platforms (Parsons, 2002). Those that share interest are able to interact with each other and extend their network. Besides, consumers can also join or follow interested peer group or reference group. (Sahney et al., 2014.)

Situational motivations. Situational factors including time pressure, geographic distance, short of mobility, attraction of substitutes, and need for specific items, have impact on consumer online behaviours (Monsuwe et al., 2014). Online shopping is a time saving solution for busy people. Additionally, those who are immobile or simply want to avoid

traveling long distance for shopping can consider the Internet as a shopping medium. (Sahney et al., 2014.) Consumers are also driven by the need for special products that are unavailable in local or physical stores (Wolfenbarger and Gilly, 2001).

Along with the above-mentioned motivations, other factors such as previous experiences with online shopping (including payment and delivery terms, offered services, security, privacy, and emotional satisfaction), personal life style, trust, and preservation of consumer's anonymity, inspire consumers to indulge in online shopping as well as shape their online behaviour (e.g. Mathwick et al., 2001; Burke, 2002). Trust plays a crucial role in the Internet shopping environment since consumers do not have control over product quality, privacy or safety of information (McKnight and Chervany, 2001 – 2002).

To sum up, there are various determinants underlie the consumer motivation to shop online, including pragmatic, product, service excellence, economic, social, demographic, and situational motivations. Each dimension has different yet also interdependent impact on consumer motivation and online behaviour.

2.3. Motivation for fashion shopping

Consumers' motives for engaging in fashion shopping include a combination of the three value dimensions: utilitarian and hedonic values, and social-related value (Figure 2).

2.3.1. Utilitarian and hedonic model

Regardless the essential of hedonic aspects of shopping experience, researchers primarily concentrated on examining utilitarian features, which lead to failure of wholly explanation and demonstrating the shopping experience (Babin et al., 1994). According to Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), pleasure seeking is a naturally characteristic of human being, and typically exposed while shopping as buyers innately search for a feeling of pleasure obtained from service experience (Carbone and Haeckel, 1994). Concerning the complexity of perceived value, which later results in consumer shopping behaviour and preference, many studies adopt the multidimensional approach (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001) and classify it into two sub-components: utilitarian and hedonic values (Babin et al., 1994).

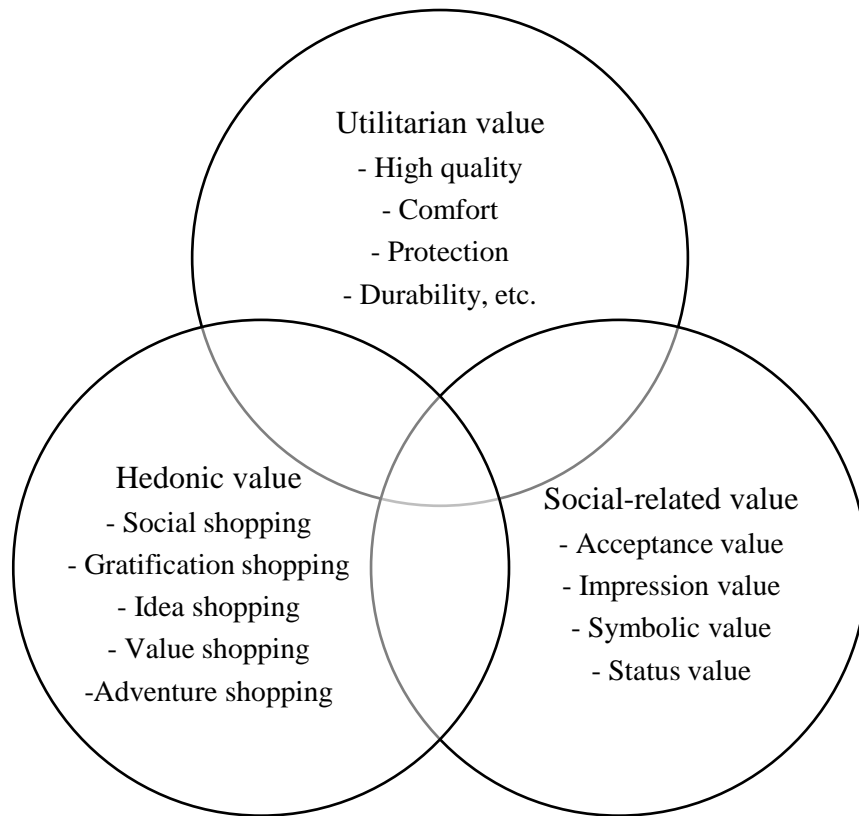


Figure 2. Motivation for fashion shopping

Utilitarian value refers to the shopping behaviour when consumers seek for solutions to problems, fulfil specific purposes, and obtain the optimal value (Babin et al., 1994; Batra and Ahtola, 1990). In other words, consumer behaviour is functional and task-related value driven (Chiu, Wang, Fang and Huang, 2014). Contrastingly, according to the study of Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), hedonic values involve those that recognise from certain aspects of the shopping experience, namely multisensory, fantastic and emotive aspects. Arnold and Reynolds (2003) identify the six dimensions of hedonic shopping motivation: adventure, social, gratification, idea, role and value shopping.

Fashion behaviours are genuinely embedded in psychological and emotional motivations (Goldsmith et al., 1996; Goldsmith and Flynn, 1992), which generate consumer behaviours in a particular manner (Solomon and Rabolt, 2006). It is argued that consumers' shopping motive, behaviour pattern and decision are value driven (Gutman, 1997), especially those of utilitarian and hedonic reasons (Childers et al., 2001; Kim, 2006; Babin et al., 1994). From the perspective of utilitarianism, shopping has been commonly seen as a rational

process that engages consumers in the need for acquiring specific products with a practical attitude (Forsythe and Bailey, 1996; Fischer and Arnold, 1990; Sherry et al., 1993). Yet, hedonic values as a shopping motivation, for example, shopping for recreation and leisure, or the roles of mood and pleasure from the sentimental perspective, have recently been examined alongside with utilitarian ones (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Halvena and Holbrook, 1986; Bagozzi and Heatherton, 1994; Hoffman and Novak, 1996).

From the analytical view of utilitarianism, consumers are problem solvers (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982) driven by utilitarian shopping motivations who engage in cognitive and task-oriented practices (Babin et al., 1994) to obtain effective and rational highlighted products (Kang and Park-Poaps, 2010). Hence, shopping has been considered as the task and goal-oriented practice of evaluating products and services with the intention of acquiring and hunting for the most valuable bargain through the market (Kim and Hong, 2011). Nevertheless, shopping also appears as a root of entertainment and emotional contentment without the presence of product acquisition (e.g. Babin et al., 1994; Tauber, 1972; Westbrook and Black, 1985). Consumers motivated by hedonic shopping values are more on “the festive or even epicurean side” (Sherry, 1990), and have a tendency of seeking for experiential shopping values, such as arousal, curiosity, enjoyment, fantasy, pleasure, and sensory stimulation (Scarpi, 2006; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982).

Utilitarian and hedonic shopping motivations have diverse impacts on consumer behaviours. Consumers who are strongly motivated by hedonic reasons have higher tendency to make purchase more frequently than those who are driven by utilitarian reasons. Hedonic shopping motivations also associate with higher purchase amounts as well as number of purchased items. (Scarpi, 2006.) The similar correlation between practicality and pleasure, and consumers’ positive attitudes in the context of online shopping (Childers et al., 2001). Even though researchers argue and compare the effect of utilitarian and hedonic values to which extent they influence consumers (e.g. Hartman, 1973; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001), both the value perspectives are crucial in consumer perceived value, and have specific meanings on satisfaction and loyalty (e.g. Lim et al., 2006). It is confirmed that there is an inter-independent and interweaved relationship between utilitarianism and hedonism (Babin et al., 1994; Scarpi, 2006), and that satisfaction obtained from both aspects can be simultaneously delivered while shopping for fashion merchandises (Scarpi, 2006).

2.3.2. Utilitarian motivation of fashion shopping

From the viewpoint of utilitarianism, consumers perceive products as a source of benefits and values, which makes product a spotlight of purchase activities. Product serves as a means of solving problems, and/or facilitating performance on assigned tasks of consumers. Thus, its value embodies in its functional ability, which is considered as the most fundamental evaluating criteria of the product. (Aulia et al., 2016.) Scholars have proposed related dimension of value in support of the need for product function, yet in various terminologies, for instance, functional value (Sheth et al., 1991), practical value (Mattsson, 1991), and efficiency and excellence value (Holbrook, 1999). During the production consumption, consumers might experience convenience value (Pura, 2005), ergonomic value (Creusen and Schoormans, 2005), and sacrifices value (e.g. Wang et al., 2004) besides functional value itself. Ko, Norum and Hawley (2010) suggest that functional value recognised in fashion includes high quality, comfort, protection, versatility, durability, ease of care, and economic benefit.

On the other hand, the value of the product is perceivable from the perspective of pleasure delivered through product consumption. From this perspective, the experience obtained from using the product is emphasised as the basic need, and has influence on consumer perception of product value. (Aulia et al., 2016.) Other studies also examine this dimension of value in terms of hedonic value (e.g. Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Babin et al., 1994), affective value (e.g. Lai, 1995), emotional value (e.g. Mattsson, 1991; Sheth et al., 1991), and play value (Holbrook, 1991). The study of Ko et al. (2010) indicates happiness, elegance, beauty, freedom, sentimentality, and the feelings of the exotic, fresh, daring and sexy as attributes of emotional value of fashion.

2.3.3. Hedonic motivation of fashion shopping

Motivations related to entertainment aspects of shopping have been universally acknowledges (Babin et al., 1994; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Scarpi, 2006). A study of Arnold and Reynolds (2003) interprets the dimensions of hedonic shopping motivations: (1) seeking for stimulation and adventure, (2) pleasure of shopping with friends and families, (3) searching for stress relief and negative feeling alleviation, (4)

pleasure of being updated with trends and fashions, and (5) pleasure in hunting for bargain and valuable discount.

Social shopping. Social shopping motivation refers to the pleasure of shopping and bonding with friends and families, and bonding with other consumers. Furthermore, this motivation includes the satisfaction of achieving and sharing information and shopping experience from and with others. (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003.) In support, Darden and Dorsch (1990) found that some consumers refer social interaction as the finest shopping motivation. This type of behaviour roots from the fundamental human needs for approval, affection and affiliation described as affiliation theories in human motivation (McGuire, 1974). In addition, the connection between social values and purchase of fashion has been strongly confirmed (Goldsmith et al., 1991).

Gratification shopping. Gratification shopping motivation occurs when consumers seek for stress relief, negative feeling alleviation purposes from shopping activity (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). Consumers practice shopping as a coping mechanism to dissociate themselves emotionally from stressful happenings or issues (Lee et al., 2001). A study of Chang, Burns and Francis (2004) reveals the significant influence of clothing on consumers' hedonic experience through measurement items "Clothing shopping is a good way for me to relax" and "Clothing shopping picks me up on a dull day". Shopping environment in general also acts as a measurement of hedonic experience scale "This shopping trip truly felt like an escape" (Michon, 2007).

Idea shopping. Making sense of oneself through the possessions of knowledge and information is one of the basic needs of human (McGuire, 1974). Idea shopping motivation illustrates the needs of being updated with the trends and new fashions, and of gaining knowledge of new products and innovations (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). Darley (1999) proves that the achieving of fashion shopping pleasure is relevant to the acquisition of product information, and with the hunt for new things (Sproles and Kendal, 1986). The practice of seeking for "new things" probably associates with updating information on fashion styles and searching for variety (Kim and Hong, 2011).

Value shopping. Value shopping motivation suggests that consumers tend to assume shopping as a bargaining game where they actively seek for outlets that offer discounts,

sale items, or bargains. Consumers have a tendency to measure their shopping experiences as a competing and objective-oriented behaviour where shopping is identical to a challenge or contest. (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003.) Due to the development of industry practices, stylist fashion are introduced to mass consumption at various price levels at the first stages of the product adoption life cycle. Hence, the amount of overstocked identical merchandises offered at multiple prices at different shops is magnificent. (Kim and Hong, 2011.) Additionally, in order to acquire adequate knowledge about different types of products and prices, consumers are obliged to frequent stores (Goldsmith and Flynn, 1992).

Adventure shopping. Adventure shopping motivation reflects the consumer's desire to shop for excitement, stimulation, adventure, and the feeling of being in another world (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003) to escape from the daily life routine (Parsons, 2002). There is a wide range of feelings associated with adventure shopping, for instance, thrills, stimulation, and excitement (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). Adventure shopping motivation reflects emotional experiences result from various activities that turns adventure shopping into a broader concept in comparison to other hedonic motivations (Kim and Hong, 2011). In support of the perception, Arnold and Reynolds (2003) define the complementary parallels among the shopping motivations, especially between adventure constructs and others. It is argued that consumers' need for adventure can also be fulfilled by other four shopping motivations (gratification value, social, and idea) (Kim and Hong, 2011). For example, consumers may attain hedonic benefits of both value shopping (bargaining) and adventure shopping (associated involvement and excitement feelings acquiring discount merchandises) (Babin et al., 1994). Likewise, Hirschman and Wallendorf (1980) also prove the connection between idea shopping (searching for new fashion trends and information), gratification shopping (associated feelings of pleasure), and adventure shopping (fulfilled needs for stimulation).

2.3.4. Personal and social motivations for fashion shopping

Social-related values. Social-related value implies the consumer perspective of viewing society as the source of value, where benefit obtaining occurs through interaction with other members of the society. The social-related value can be classified into the perspectives of need for acceptance and need for compliment. (Aulia et al., 2016.) From

the first perspective, a product value lies in its ability to help a consumer achieve social acceptance (Aulia et al., 2016), and can be recognised when the consumer feels the connection between him/herself and other people (Sheth et al., 1991). Maslow (1943) explains that acceptance value is a part of basic need in which consumers may encounter uncomfortable feelings if products fail to deliver this need, and develop negative attitude and behaviour towards such products, and vice versa. It is anticipated that there is a solid connection between consumer need for acceptance and the common behaviour and/or perception adopted by the majority of the society (e.g. Pavlou and Chai, 2002; Yang and Jolly, 2009). Nevertheless, to some extent, consumer personal values might determine the adoption of certain behaviour or perception so that it does not contradict their beliefs, goals, or principles (Aulia et al., 2016).

From the opposed point of view, perceived value of the product also arises when the consumer acquire endorsement or affection from the society through interaction while consuming the product. Similarly, the need for compliment or appreciation, also termed as impression value, addressed by the psychologist William James as “the deepest principle in human nature”, makes another feature of basic human need. (Aulia et al., 2016.) In order to achieve social respect or acknowledgement, consumers have tendency to seek for products enhancing their social self-concept (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). According to Maslow (1943), consumer need for respect emerges from the need to have self-esteem, and the need for self-respect.

Those who have the need to have self-esteem tend to seek for recognition from the society, or in other words, fame and glory. It is proposed that consumers seeking for respect from others also express their desire for status, prestige, attention, recognition, et cetera. The mentioned needs reflect consumers’ craving for products that boost their self-esteem through obtained admirations and positive comments regarding the products in use. In order to impress their peers, consumers are likely to target “unusual” products, such as high-end products or brands that are not affordable to the majority of the society, or scarce products that are limited to the mass, which awards them with social attention. Consumers might also gain popularity by possessing famous or popular products perceived by the society. (Aulia et al., 2016.) Consumers inspired by the society instead of the psychological or economic utility of a product are identified as conspicuous consumers

who seek for impression by showing their ability to afford high-end products (Mason, 1981). These efforts imply consumer perception of impression value (Aulia et al., 2016).

On the other hand, Aulia et al. (2016) concern the need for self-respect as a higher version of the need for self-esteem in which consumers respect him/herself, including need for freedom, self-confidence or independence, instead of seeking for respect from others. In other words, consumers with self-respect are oblivious to their peers' opinion and judgment (Langer, 1999). This need associates with the acquisition of products to satisfy own-self, thus obtain uniqueness as an individual, which makes it more of personal-related value (Aulia et al., 2016).

Symbolic values. The value of products lies in not only its aesthetic and the above-mentioned dimensions measurements, but also interpret symbolic meanings (Creusen and Schoormans, 2005). Levy (1959; 1978) supports this idea confirming symbolic uses of products. Symbolic meanings concern the perceived features of products that are not part of product appearance (Blank et al., 1984). They offer sensory appeal and satisfaction while communicating consumers' information as well as their relations to others (Bloch, 1995). Simultaneously, with anticipated product symbolism, consumers might assess other value dimensions of the products (Blijlevens et al., 2009).

Status value. O'Cass and McEwen (2004) define status value as the need for respect and social prestige that drive consumer behaviour obtained through product acquisition and consumption. The definition of status varies from the position of an individual in a society given by others (Bierstedt, 1970; Dawson & Cavell, 1986), to the judgment regarding one's prestige or esteem (Donnewerth & Foal, 1974). Status consumers have inclination to seek for uniqueness and distinction through status consumption (Clark et al., 2007). Following the introduction of luxury (conspicuous) consumption idea (Veblen, 1997), scholars have widely acknowledged the idea of exhibiting status, richness, and affordability by purchasing high-priced products, which is highly similar to status consumption (Eastman et al., 1999). Clark et al. (2007) confirm the connection between status consumption and NU.

2.4. Summary on motivation

This study aims at understanding uniqueness-seeking consumer behaviour in the context of online fashion consumption. In this paper, online shopping is examined as a context where consumers perform seeking-uniqueness behaviours through product acquisition and consumption. The phenomenon of online shopping itself is not the focus of this paper, yet the motivations that encourage consumers to shop and make purchase on the Internet environment is the focal point. The author believes that motivations for online shopping determine consumer selection of shopping medium for apparels and/or accessories. Yet, prior to making decision on shopping channel, consumers should already be motivated to shop for fashion products. Hence, the author also conducts an investigation on possible motivations driving consumers towards their involvement in fashion shopping. (Figure 3.)

Briefly, the online environment contributes as a shopping solution, and conveys sought values to fashion consumers. The information-rich and restriction-free nature of the Internet facilitates consumers' shopping experiences in plentiful manners. For instance, consumers driven by value shopping motivation can derive satisfaction from online shopping with accessibility to multiple e-retailers simultaneously, which assists the practice of price comparison. The online environment also offers access to those seeking for enjoyment by the acquisition of new fashion and trends with the ability to be up-to-date with fashion movement constantly.

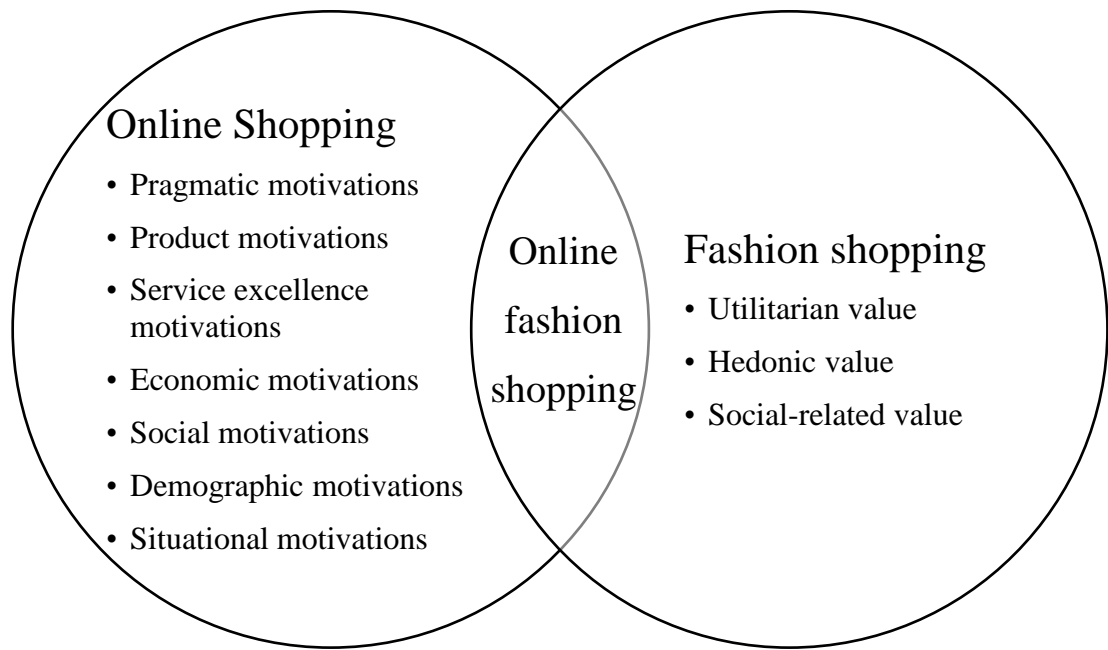


Figure 3. Motivation for online fashion shopping

Furthermore, the Internet provides a large social-networking platform where consumers can effortlessly connect with not only significant ones, yet also others who share similar interest in fashion. Through virtual communities, consumers are able to socialise, share and obtain fashion knowledge or shopping experiences. However, consumers motivated by adventure shopping might as well utilise the online environment to fulfil their need for, for example, social escapism. The Internet is a distinct place provoking individuals to be more adventurous where individuals experience, behave, and perceive the world differently (Aiken, 2016). Thus, it is possible that consumers engage in online shopping to escape from their daily life routine.

To sum up, it is reasonable to presume that the motivations for online shopping and fashion shopping interdependently complement each other and drive consumers to adopt online environment as a channel to shop for fashion products.

3. CONSUMERS' NEED FOR UNIQUENESS (CNFU)

3.1. Definition and sub-factors

3.1.1. Definition

CNFU indicates the differences in consumer counter-conformity motivation. The concept of counter-conformity motivation refers to the desire that drives consumers to distinguish themselves from relative others with the consumption and visual display of consumer goods to achieve differentness. (Tian et al., 2001.) Counter-conformity motivation refers to the need that emerges when consumers are subject to identity threat resulting from being too similar to others (Snyder and Fromkin, 1977, 1980; Nail, 1986). Consequently, consumers conquer the perceived similarity and improve distinctiveness from their peers by acquiring, utilising and disposing consumer goods. Additionally, it is presumed that the NU reflect the process of improving consumers' self-image and social image through the obtaining, utilisation, and disposal of consumption products (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967).

Considering the degrees of consistency, reliability, and ability to foresee a wide range of uniqueness-related consumption decisions of CNFU (Lynn and Snyder, 2002; Ruvio, 2008; Ruvio et al., 2008; Tian et al., 2001; Tian and McKenzie, 2001), it is a valid and trustworthy measure of the need to seek for uniqueness through consumption (Weiherl, 2011). Hence, CNFU is employed in the paper to obtain deeper understanding of uniqueness-seeking consumer behaviour.

Scholars express opposite opinions about being unique. They believe that uniqueness associates with certain benefits, yet being too different has its drawbacks. High-uniqueness individuals might endure negative feedback and social isolation provoked by neglecting feelings of others (Mengers, 2014). Greater cultural estrangement also appears to have positive relation to high levels of uniqueness (Bernard et al., 2006). Moreover, being too different from their peers could ignite prejudice, discrimination and stigmatisation (Lynn and Snyder, 2002). On the other hand, researches confirm the contribution of uniqueness and distinctiveness of individuals on the societal level (e.g. Lynn and Snyder, 2002). Dollinger (2003) suggests that high levels of uniqueness coincide with greater creativity.

High-uniqueness-driven individuals have more opportunities to practice their distinctiveness in an open, accepting, and negative-consequence-free environment. Hence, they are more inclined to share their knowledge, ideas, and perspective. Respectively, greater diversity authorises more development and utilisation of strategies and resources used to solve societal problems. (Mengers, 2014.) In support of this concept, Kelley (1957) confirms that specialisation empowered by individual differences assists the development progress of society.

3.1.2. Three sub-factors

Previous research works on theory of NU, nonconformity, and consumer behaviour conceptualise CNFU as including three behavioural dimensions (Figure 4), namely, creative choice counter-conformity, unpopular choice counter-conformity, and avoidance of similarity (Tian et al., 2001).

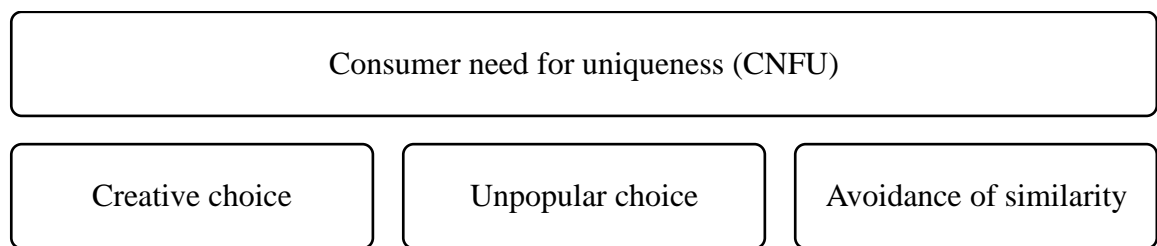


Figure 4. Sub-factors of consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU)

Creative choice counter-conformity. In order to communicate differentness, individuality, or unique identity, conceiving a personal style using material products is inevitable (Kron, 1983). Expressing personal style in material displays can be attained by purchasing consumer goods that are original, novel, or unique (Kron, 1983), or obtaining decorative collection, arranging, or displaying of the goods (Belk et al., 1989). They might also acquire unusual brands or products, or mix and match apparel in a chosen way to invent a unique personal image (Weiherl, 2011). Such consumer behaviour is recognised as creative choice counter-conformity. Consumers pursuing social differentness from the majority through creative choice counter-conformity have the tendency to make selections that are likely perceived as good choices. (Tian et al., 2001.) Snyder and Fromkin (1977) propose the certain relationship between the act of creative choice counter-conformity and positive social evaluations of a consumer as a unique individual.

Unpopular choice counter-conformity. The practices of unpopular choice counter-conformity to determine differentness suggest the choice and consumption of products and brands that neglect social norms and risk exposing consumers to social disapproval (Tian et al., 2001). It is possible that consumers negatively differentiate themselves from others through inappropriate acts in case they fail to appreciate proper ones (Ziller, 1964). Besides social disapproval and judgments of consumers' taste resulted from dissent from social rules, customs or norms, unpopular choice counter-conformity might generate enhancement of self-image and social image (Tian et al., 2001). There are opportunities that those risk social approval to insist differentness declare good character, that results in improved self-image (Gross, 1977); and that consumer choices that are unpopular at first might earn widespread social recognition afterwards and distinguish a consumer as an innovator or leader (Heckert, 1989). Weiherl (2011) suggests that it is more effortless to be outstanding by rejecting social rules and norms than by following it.

Avoidance of similarity. This approach refers to "the loss of interest in, or discontinued use of, possessions that become commonplace in order to move away from the norm and re-establish one's differentness" (Tian et al., 2001, p. 53). Consumers with high NU score tend to avoid similarity by monitoring others' possessions of product categories, and depreciating and avoiding the acquisition of brands or products that are acknowledged as commonplace (Tian et al., 2001). Tian et al. (2001) consider the temporary nature of distinctive self-images and social images as the cause to avoidance of similarity. It is observable that consumer choices, especially creative choices, are more likely to be imitated as other individuals also pursue distinctiveness or seek for common links with innovator groups (Fisher and Price, 1992).

3.2. Theory of uniqueness

The concept of CNFU evolves from Snyder and Fromkin's (1980) theory of uniqueness. The theory of uniqueness acknowledges consumers' need for being distinct from other persons, and defines the emotional and behavioural responses of an individual to extreme similarities or dissimilarities to others. The theory suggests that, NU exists on continuum, in gradations from mild to full-blown frequently manifested behaviours. Hence, the higher the level of similarities, the more negative the reactions. (Snyder and Fromkin, 1980.) In

addition to individual differences, cultural variable has imperative influence on the NU functions. Those from individualistic culture may experience the NU differently from those from collectivistic culture. For example, the individualistic culture encourages and emphasises separateness and individual attributes that advocates its members to differentiate themselves from relevant others. On the other hand, the collectivistic culture prioritises belongingness and social relations that results in the recognition of the NU as a conflict with the general culture characteristics. Therefore, individuals with high NU have tendency to avoid being an atypical and disassociated from the society regardless their striving for being distinct from their peers. (Park, 2012.)

Under circumstances when consumers' self-perception of uniqueness is threatened, the need for being different strives over other motives. In order to reclaim their self-esteem as well as lessen the negative effects, consumers adopt self-differentiating courses of actions. Latter et al. (2010) suggest that, in emerged economies, the NU disguises as the need for esteem and prestige. Besides the constraint of social approval and social affiliation resulting in limitation in uniqueness striving (Snyder and Fromkin, 1980), consumers seek for various forms and outlets to express their uniqueness to avoid or reduce severity of social penalties, such as social isolation and/or disapproval. Expressing consumers' differentness through material is preferable considering its ability to please the NU without exposing consumers to social penalties. (Tian et al., 2001.)

The degrees of the NU vary from one consumer to another (Snyder and Fromkin, 1977), as each consumer's has different approach to satisfy his/her desire (Tian et al., 2001). The study of Snyder (1992) reveals that individual's NU drives the intensity of eagerness of dissimilarities to others, and of sensitivity of similarities to his/her peers. They may pursue their need with possessions display (Belk, 1988), interpersonal interaction style (Maslach et al., 1985), or mastered domains of knowledge (Holt, 1995). In other words, the manners adopted to fulfil the NU vary from possessions to consumer behaviours (Tian et al., 2001).

3.3. Manifestations of CFNU

3.3.1. Uniqueness attributes

Consumer behaviours and material possessions (Belk, 1985; 1988) are not the only approach to pursue uniqueness. Consumers might express their uniqueness in either consumer domain and/or non-economic domain (Mathew, 2016). Besides the consumer domain, the non-economic domain includes behaviours providing vehicles for satisfying the NU, such as style of interpersonal actions (Maslach et al., 1985), domain of knowledge and expertise (Holt, 1995), or beliefs (Snyder, 1992). Uniqueness attributes include physical, informational, experiential, and material characteristics (Fromkin, 1968; Snyder and Fromkin, 1980). Those that are focus on their self-theory or identity have the tendency to seek for uniqueness on the mentioned domains (Berger and Heath, 2007). Nevertheless, Lynn and Snyder (2002) identify the two most dominant sources of sense of uniqueness, namely group identifications, and consumer products and experiences, considering that they are most people-centric (Weiherl, 2011). Regarding the purpose of this paper, uniqueness-driven consumer behaviour is chosen for deeper studies.

3.3.2. Consumption – a way to seek for uniqueness

Consumers are simultaneously driven by the motivation to be unique, and the motivation to belong somewhere (Weiherl, 2011). Researchers report that although consumers engage in distinctiveness and uniqueness seeking behaviours, they are conscious about social judgment towards the behaviours and avoid exposure to social isolation or disapproval (Lynn and Harris, 1997; Ruvio, 2008; Snyder and Fromkin, 1977; 1980; Tian et al., 2001; Tian and McKenzie, 2001). Brewer (1991, 1993) explains this assumption by introducing the optimum distinctiveness theory. As mentioned, consumer behaviours are under the influence of both the need for differentiation and the need for assimilation (Pickett and Brewer, 2000; Pickett et al., 2002) because of individual's sense of security and self-worth threat (Weiherl, 2011). According to Brewer (1991, p. 478), "being highly individuated leaves one vulnerable to isolation and stigmatisation (even excelling on positively valued dimensions creates social distance and potential rejection). However, total deindividuation provides no basis for comparative appraisal or self-definition". Thus, consumers are likely

to pursue the balance between assimilation and differentiation (Pickett et al., 2002). CNFU facilitates consumers to satisfy both of the needs (Ruvio, 2008).

Product consumption is a socially accepted manner to seek for uniqueness (Ruvio, 2008; Snyder, 1992; Tepper, 1997; Tian et al., 2001). It takes effort to use consumption goods inappropriately or extremely enough to cause the endurance of social disapproval. For example, a self-designed printed T-shirt normally does not result in social neglect. (Weiherl, 2011.) Additionally, it is argued that the realisation of uniqueness-driven consumer behaviours only occurs if consumers are free of criticism and sanctions to certain extent (Schiffman and Kanuk, 1994).

3.3.3. Desire for unique consumer products (DUCP)

Consumers diverge from one another through the degrees of importance they perceive the acquisition and possessions of products possessed by few others as a personal goal (Harris and Lynn, 1996). DUCP refers to such goal-oriented and individual differences (Lynn and Harris, 1997). Contrary to CNFU, DUCP emphasises on the motivations driving acquisition of unique consumer products. In addition to the theory of uniqueness and counter-conformity motivation, status aspiration and materialism also prompt consumers' choices on products or brands purchase. Belk (1985) describes personal status aspiration and materialism as variables of CNFU. Lynn and Harris (1997) classify status aspiration and materialism as the antecedents of the desire for unique consumer products, alongside with the NU.

Status inspiration refers to the consumer behaviours driven by the affection of dominance and leadership in social hierarchies (Cassidy and Lynn, 1989). It is noticeable that consumers acquire and declare social status through possessions and display of consumer goods (e.g. Dawson and Cavell, 1986; Form and Stone, 1957; Goffman, 1951; Veblen, 1899/1965). Consumer products that are scarce or unique reflect status symbol more effectively (Belk, 1980; Blumberg, 1974; Rae, 1905).

Materialism refers to the personality trait that has tendency to consider the importance of material possessions (Belk, 1985), and that exposes more acquisitive and possessive characteristics (Belk, 1985; Richins and Dawson, 1992). Hence, it is presumable that

materialistic consumers are likely to pursue uniqueness and social status through possessions of consumption goods (Lynn and Harris, 1997). Alongside with materialism, extraversion and creativity are characteristics that drive consumers to express their striving for uniqueness than others (Hoyer and Ridgway, 1984). In addition, it is argued that consumers of younger age tend to demonstrate higher needs for uniqueness than the older (Lynn and Harris, 1997).

3.3.4. Clothing as uniqueness attributes

Clothing is a type of consumer product. Conceptually, clothing is referred to as material production that satisfies the essential needs for physical protection and functionality, whilst fashion is concerned as symbolic production (Kaiser, 1990) that unites human being with its emotional needs. The need of creativity can also be satisfied with clothing and fashion. (Niinimäki, 2010.) Keiser (1990) argues that a constitutional part of communication in social interaction bases on clothes.

Clothing is also recognised as a uniqueness attribute that gives special value signal (Snyder and Fromkin, 1980). Stone (1962) indicates that appearance is one of the crucial communication form in symbolic interaction, which establish, maintain and alter one's self. A fundamental attribute of appearance is clothing. To certain extent, clothing, for instance, uniforms or distinctive apparel, acts as means of symbols that reflects an individual's social announcements. (Snyder and Fromkin, 1980.) Similarity in clothing unifies a group of people sharing the same social class, and discriminates them from members of other social classes (Simmel, 1957).

The theory of uniqueness is apparently relevant to fashion. Regardless the conformity in styles (for example, the length of women's bottoms, or the width of men's collars), the anxiety emerged from similarity in clothing at a certain social event is confirmed. The relationship between clothing and the uniqueness self-perception is supported by one's unpleasant feelings and responses resulting from receiving information of similarity of another identical suit or dress. Since people might not wear the same things, clothing can be valued in part. (Snyder and Fromkin, 1980.)

An experiment conducted by Fromkin et al. (1974) reveals that those who have higher desire of uniqueness perceive scarce fashion objects as more preferable in comparison to those that have lower need. A handbag, for instance, seems to be anticipated as desirable if it is perceived as a scarce item, or as being available to a few other consumers, then when it is recognised as a plentiful item. This perception is greater reflected if the handbag symbolises its consumer as unique. Oppositely, low-uniqueness consumers might prefer plentiful handbags to the scarce ones. (Fromkin et al., 1974; as cited in Snyder and Fromkin, 1980.)

The relationship between clothing and uniqueness attributes is realised by those specialised in clothing marketing merchandising and fashion distribution. The correlation between limited edition and “original” in fashion, and impression of high prices and high quality is often confused. However, the use of high price and high quality in fashion has an effect on distinguishing the self from the large others. (Snyder and Fromkin, 1980.)

The study of Szybillo (1973) suggests that scarce fashion items are more desirable, more distinctive, higher quality, and more probable to be purchased in comparison to plentiful ones. The research works requested participants to rate ladies’ pant suits varied in scarcity in terms of “overall desirability”, “distinctiveness”, “quality” and “likelihood of purchase” for each of the pant suits. As mentioned, the results revealed that the scarcer pantsuits were more preferred. Furthermore, according to a scale that measured fashion leadership, the research categorised participants into high and low fashion-opinion leadership groups. The research result presented favourability of fashion leaders towards scarce pantsuits over plentiful items as compared to non-fashion leaders. Thus, this suggested the connection between the inclination of being the pioneer of new products and ideas, and the assessment of merchandises that are inaccessible to the large others. (Szybillo, 1973; as cited in Snyder and Fromkin, 1980.)

Within the context of fashion, NU varies among different fashion consumer groups. Fashion consumers can be classified into four major groups: fashion innovators, fashion opinion leaders, innovative communicators, and fashion followers. Briefly, consumers that firstly adopt new fashions are the fashion innovator; those that influence others to purchase and consume a new fashion are fashion opinion leaders; those who are among the first adopters and influence others are innovative communicators; and those that adopt the

fashion accepted by the majority are fashion followers. (Workman and Kidd, 2000.) As described by Fromkin and Lipschitz (1976), people with high NU are inventive, non-conforming, and are willing to exhibit their uniqueness-seeking behaviours regardless the social disapproval risks. They also have great affection for new and unique consumption products, and express more innovative behaviours in comparison to those with lower NU (Burns, 1989; Lynn and Harris, 1997). Regarding the description of high uniqueness consumers, fashion innovators, fashion opinion leaders, and innovative communicators share similar characteristics. In contrast, fashion followers possess traits identical to those with low NU who have more tendency to conform and are less willing to risk social disapproval. (Workman and Kidd, 2000.)

3.4. Pursuit of uniqueness through consumption

3.4.1. Fashion consumption

Beyond clothing, fashion is a sophisticated term that covers a wide range of aspects of human life, namely, architecture, poetry, and music (Fang et al., 2012), or principles that shape behaviours, and the mixture of individual difference and social uniformity (Simmel, 2001). The concept of fashion is divided into two categories, “one of which is that fashion refers to clothing, the other is that fashion is a general mechanism, logic or ideology which applies to many fields and clothing is one of the field” (Svendsen, 2006). Regarding the scope of this paper, the terms fashion and fashion products strictly refer to clothing.

According to Veblen (1997), consumption is the practices of acquiring and accumulating products motivated by the needs of satisfying consumers’ physical wants, and the so-called higher wants (e.g. spiritual, aesthetic, or intellectual). In support of Veblen’s definition, scholars characterise consumption as an exercise driven by both consumers’ practical needs and desires to communicate about themselves to related others (e.g. Dittmar, 1992; Benson, 2000). Motivation of goods ownership emerges from emulation (Veblen, 1997), and over-consumption is driven by consumers’ wish to flaunt (Fang et al., 2012). In the context of fashion, consumption and display of possessions are conventional approaches to attain respectable appearance rather than protection (Veblen, 1997). In other words, consumers’ psychological needs to show-off and compete embody their behaviours (Fang

et al., 2012). In accordance with the finding in consumption motives, Veblen (1997) proposes a feature of fashion consumption termed *conspicuous consumption*. Conspicuous consumption refers to the behaviour of showing off one's social status, wealth or power through consumption (Veblen, 1997). It is concluded that, since showing-off plays a determinant role in fashion consumption, conspicuous consumption is one of the prime features (Fang et al., 2012).

Under different cultural contexts, motives of fashion consumption vary. In Asia, the dominant motivations include conspicuous consumption and unrealistic comparison, whilst the major motivation in Europe and America is the pursuit of happiness. This classifies fashion consumption into social consumption motives (consumers seek for ostentation, conformity, socialisation and symbol of status) and individual consumption motives (consumers seek for high quality, self-enjoyment, and self-gifting). (Fang et al., 2012.) Regarding the classified motives, Fang et al. (2012) categorise the psychological motives of fashion consumption into rational motives and perceptual motives. Rational motives concern consumers' need for pursuing good quality and service, usefulness, outward appearance, and reliability of a product at reasonable price. On the other hand, perceptual motives refer to motivations for uniqueness, distinctiveness, showing-off, unrealistic comparison, and conformity to foreign things. Nevertheless, the boundary between the rational and perceptual motives is rather vague considering consumers' ability to be perfectly analytical or sensational. It is noteworthy that all the mentioned elements might have impact on consumer behaviours simultaneously. (Fang et al., 2012.)

The essence of fashion consumption is to fulfil consumers' desire to express their social status and uniqueness (Fang et al., 2012). Fang et al. (2012) categories the behaviour of fashion consumption into consumption on luxury fashion and on general commodities. Typically, luxury and high-end possessions transfer symbolic meanings of scarcity, extravagance, expensive and high quality of products. The development of industrialisation shifts the measurement of luxury products from production method (e.g. fine handcraft) to product quality standard and rareness. High-end brands affirm their reputation by adopting product limitation and high pricing strategies. Meanwhile, industrialisation empowers the expansion of general fashion emphasising product usefulness, comfort and partial symbolic meaning. While luxury fashion meets the needs

for displaying social status, general fashion fulfil the pursuit of function, taste, pricing and quality of the middle class. (Fang et al., 2012.)

Eastman et al. (1999) conceptualise status consumption as the behaviour of consuming products that benefit consumers with esteem and prestige to improve their social position and status. Status consumers and uniqueness seeking consumers acquire products to elevate their images before others (Latter et al., 2010). Status consumption is independent from social class (Kilsheimer, 1993), concerning that symbol of prestige exists at all levels of society, and that consumers at all class levels might have certain interest in pursuing social status through consumption before their peers (Goldsmith et al., 1996).

Researchers affirm the correlation between consumers' desire for status and decision to buy new fashionable apparels (Dichter, 1985; Millenson, 1985; Sproles, 1985; O'Shaughnessy, 1987). Goldsmith et al. (1996) propose the association between status consumption and certain fashion-related variables, such as, involvement, innovativeness, perceived knowledge, opinion leadership and seeking, and shopping and spending for new fashions.

Status oriented consumers tend to be more involved with fashion commodities than those with lower desire for social status are (Goldsmith et al., 1996). Involvement in fashion refers to the extent to which consumers engage in various fashion-related concepts besides awareness, interest, reactions, and knowledge (Holmberg and Öhnfeldt, 2010). From the perspective of high status consuming consumers, new fashions offer them opportunities to improve status among their peers, which makes it more interesting and promising to be involved. The attraction of fashion products is largely embedded in its newness; hence, status-seeking consumers are fond of new clothing and fashion styles. Moreover, to promote their status, consumers also express innovativeness for new apparels. (Goldsmith et al., 1996.)

Involved and innovative consumers tend to be more insightful about the interested products than their peers are (Roger, 1983). Thus, status driven consumers seem to be more knowledgeable about new fashions as their motivation for status pursuit would inspire them to be more attentive of the new fashions that express their wearers' status (Goldsmith et al., 1996).

Kilsheimer (1993) suggests that consumers with higher need for status are more socially aware and exhibit more enthusiasm in relationships in comparison to other consumers. Consumers with high social interest engage themselves in social interaction with others. Besides, together with their fashion involvement and innovativeness, and insight about new fashions, they are more likely to become opinion leaders and have impact on other consumers' fashion choice. Additionally, since they are highly concerned with their influence on other consumers, they will also act as opinion seekers searching for other fashion leaders' opinions in order to assure their fashion decisions and enhance their status. High status driven consumers also devote their resources to purchase fashion items claiming that they shop more and spend more for (new) fashions compared to low status driven consumers. (Goldsmith et al., 1996.)

Besides, *symbolic consumption* acts as another source of fashion consumption. Symbolic consumption refers to the course of behaviour expressing the essence of identity, character and taste (Fang et al., 2012). Piacentini and Maller (2004) describes symbolic consumption as a mechanism of using products to establish, construct, and maintain consumers' identities. Through the symbolic meaning of consumption and possessions, symbolic communicational link surfaces and expresses consumers' identity to their peers (Dittmar, 1992). Additionally, possessions of material goods can also communicate consumers' social status and social position alongside with their qualities of individuals (Dittmar, 1992; O'Cass and McEwen, 2004). Fang et al. (2012) suggest the assimilation of consumers into the defined life styles of purchased fashion products, and, as a result, internalisation of the life styles to consumers' way of living. Thus, the psychological motivation of fashion consumption comprises conspicuous and symbolic meaning (Fang et al., 2012).

3.4.2. Typology of consumption

Douglas Holt (1995) categorises consumption practices into four metaphors according to its purpose and structure of action, namely, consuming as experience, consuming as integration, consuming and classification, and consuming as play (Figure 5). Concerning the relevance of this paper, two of the metaphors (consuming as integration, and consuming as classification) are going to be discussed further in detail.

		PURPOSE OF ACTION	
		Autotelic actions	Instrumental actions
STRUCTURE OF ACTION	Object actions	Consuming as experience	Consuming as integration
	Interpersonal actions	Consuming as play	Consuming as classification

Figure 5. Metaphors for consuming (Holt, 1995)

Consuming as integration. Consuming as integration refers to the way a valued consumption object perceived as an essential element of consumers' identity in order to enhance their self-perception (Holt, 1995). Integration can be pursued by either (1) harmonising symbolic meanings of consumption objects into a consumer's established identity, or so called self-extension process (Belk, 1988), or (2) re-establishing the consumer's own identity to align with an institutionally defined identity (Zerubavel, 1991; cf. Solomon, 1983). Integrating mass-produced consumption objects (e.g. fast-fashion and ready-to-wear clothes, off-the-peg garments) is more complicated than those that involve consumers into the creation process (e.g. photography, parties) (Holt, 1995), concerning the embodied quality of the objects (Miller, 1987). This metaphor bridges the institutional gap between consumers and consumption object, which is paramount to construct and deliver meaningful experience of consuming the object yet restraining consumers from comprehensively appropriate its meanings. (Holt, 1995.) There are methods to practice this integrating metaphor: assimilating, producing, and personalising.

Assimilating refers to the methods of consumers becoming competent participants of the interested social world, that involves "thinking like, feeling like, acting like, and looking like" a member of the world (Holt, 1995, p. 7). To develop a tied bond between a consumer

and the fashion world, establishing a strong connection through quality interaction between the individual and valued elements of the fashion world is fundamental. Assimilating may occur when the consumer attends or watches fashion shows on television, reads fashion magazines, or talks about fashion with families and friends. However, shopping for fashion products yields exceptional opportunities for assimilating, as the consumer is able to interact directly with the products, shopping atmosphere, and other members of the world at an unbelievable level that cannot be delivered through other modes of consumption.

Producing is another approach to exercise integrating. This method facilitates consumers to perceive their meaning involvement in the production of consumption products. Involving in the production of consumption experiences empowers the consumer with a considerable degree of control. (Holt, 1995.) A member of fashion world might pursue the sense of production participation by designing clothes and realising their designs themselves or seek for help from professional tailors.

Consumers' affirmation the individuality of their connection with the fashion world by adding extra-institutional elements to the world is termed *personalising* practices. Similar to producing, personalising associates with consumers' impact exerted on fashion yet the influence goes beyond the institutional boundaries and customises the world to some extent. (Holt, 1995.) There are literatures that describe acts of personalising as symbolic and physical tailoring of mass-produced products so that consumers attain manipulation on meaning-carrying properties (Belk, 1988; Belk et al., 1989; McCracken, 1986; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). In other words, the act of modifying institutional elements of the consumption world undertaken by consumers' manipulations is personalising. Under specific circumstances, the practice of altering objects is an institutionalised act structured by particular social worlds, such as obtaining a homey and cosy look by decorating a house (McCracken, 1989), or preparing a homemade meal on Thanksgiving (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). It is suggested that these cases correspond to the traits of assimilating practices better than personalising practices since these consumers dedicate their effort to integrate into a unified identity instead of singularising the object (Holt, 1995).

Consuming as classification. Consuming as classification metaphor implies the way consumers communicate with and differentiate themselves from the relevant others using consumption objects, including their practices of experiencing and integrating. With classifying practices, consumers are able to both build affiliation with the interested world, and enlarge their distinction among other consumers. (Holt, 1995.) Fashion brands offer sufficient means for establishing and developing affiliation through the totemic symbols of brand images, and consumer societies. Having advanced sense of affiliation as a fan of a fashion brand might contribute to distinction between a consumer and those whose dedication is not as great or those who affiliate with other brands. Building affiliation with a fashion style and/or fashion designer also serves classification purpose. Those engaging in classifying practices can classify themselves through objects or actions.

The act of classifying oneself or others by adopting the shared meanings related to a consumption objects is termed *classifying through objects*. Many researches acknowledge possessions and displaying possessions to others are interactional practices of this type of classification concerning their focus on examining visual material products, such as clothing, housing, and automobiles (e.g., Fisher & Price, 1992; Kleine & Kernan, 1991). (Holt, 1995.) Establishing the nature of relationship between a consumer and a consumption object in fashion is not problematic. As mention, displaying is a description of how the consumer communicate their distinction and established association with fashion brands, styles, or other symbolically valued elements of the fashion world through objects.

On another hand, *classifying through actions* covers the classification of consumers through their experience with consumption objects. Hence, the interaction between consumers and the objects matters instead of meanings of the objects. (Holt, 1995.) In the fashion world, there are manifold ways to convey the meanings of consumers' interaction with fashion items, or indeed the fashion world, for example, keeping up with trends, mentoring, and expressing tastes. Fashion-conscious consumers tend to have higher involvement with fashion. Highly fashion-involved consumers are likely to be acknowledgeable (Goldsmith et al., 1996) and aware of fashion-related activities and concepts (Holmberg and Öhnfeldt, 2010). Staying up-to-date on fashion trends empowers consumers to both express their trendy and fashionable identities and communicate their, for instance, commitment with fashion since following fashion trends is delicate

concerning its momentary nature. Another approach of classifying through action is expressing tastes. Fashion-oriented consumers might distinguish themselves by declaring their allegiance to certain brands, collections, or designers. Developing a signature style also signifies consumers' taste.

3.4.3. Product and experience as sources of uniqueness

Consumers expose their needs for uniqueness through the activities of seeking for goods and services, and experiences that differentiate them from the others (Lynn and Harris, 1997). As mentioned, self-differentiation is achievable through possessing unique products (Fromkin, 1971; Snyder, 1992). Purchased and consumed products communicate consumers' desired identities (Belk, 1988; Escalas and Bettman, 2003, 2005; Kleine et al., 1993), and assume consumers' aspects (such as preferences and identities) through purchase decisions (Calder and Burnkrant, 1977). It is possible that consumers pursue their self-uniqueness by obtaining scarce, modern, or relatively unpopular products that are possessed by only a few. Another option for ensuring the self-uniqueness is shopping and purchasing from less common places, or by personalising commonly owned products. (Lynn and Harris, 1997.)

Desire for scarce products. Unique product possessions differentiate consumers from their related others (Fromkin, 1970; Snyder, 1992). Scarcity has been proved to improve attractiveness of variety of products, from clothing and records (Brehm et al., 1966; Szybillo, 1973, 1975), leather boots and wine (Fromkin et al., 1974; Lynn, 1991), furniture and art prints (Atlas and Snyder, 1978), to consumer food as cookies, dormitory food, and soft drinks (Ringold, 1988; West, 1975; Worchel, Lee, and Adewole, 1975). It is explained that, since there is only a minority group of consumers who can possess scarce products in comparison to non-scarce ones, scarce products act as a differentiator to classify them from their peers (Brock, 1968; Snyder and Fromkin, 1980). Snyder (1992) suggests that scarce possessions play an important role in generalising customers' sense of specialness that drives the catch-22 carousel. The scarcity effects result from consumers' perception of uniqueness emerged from their appreciation of differences between products (Tian et al., 2001). Besides the sense of self-uniqueness (Snyder and Fromkin, 1980), product scarcity provides a premise for downward comparisons with those non-possessors (Wills, 1981), and power over those that desire the scarce products (Emerson, 1962).

Snyder's (1992) work on consumer catch-22 carousel suggests the motivation behind consumers' needs for preserving their sense of uniqueness in the context of scarce commodities. Consumers' affection towards scarce products arises from, and is magnified by their high NU (Snyder, 1992). Comprehending this phenomenon, marketers and advertisers entice consumers to purchase their latest versions of their products, which are frequently featured minor changes, continuously with scarcity advertisements (Snyder et al., 2011). As the acquisition of scarce products is successful, the sense of uniqueness descends since the commodities are also possessed and consumed universally. Hence, to secure their sense of specialness, consumers continue to seek for another unique merchandise, which provide advertisers and producers with opportunities to launch other scarcity campaigns. (Snyder, 1992.)

Snyder (1992) argues that the sense of uniqueness fuels the sustained search for unique products rather than the desire for status. It is claimed that a scarce possession does not need to always associate with any extrinsic monetary or status value. Yet value of a scarce object remains in its capability of defining the owner's specialness in term of identity dimension of importance. (Snyder, 1992.)

Consumer innovativeness. Adopting new products while the majority has not accepted yet is another origin of being different (Lynn and Harris, 1997). It is typical that a small group of consumer innovators firstly adopt the new products then influence later consumers (Robertson, 1971; Rogers, 1983). Hence, acquisition of new product before others do is an approach to fulfil the NU (Burns and Krampf, 1992; Fromkin, 1970). This idea is frequently witnessed in fashion industry, where fashion opinion leaders relatively early adopt new fashion trends and products, and influence purchase decisions of late adopters (Lynn and Harris, 1997).

Customisation of products. Customisation of common products offers opportunities for consumers to obtain personalised products that are different from that delivered to others. Hence, customisation and customised products tend to be more favoured by consumers with strong needs for uniqueness than those with a weaker need are. (Lynn and Harris, 1997.)

Less popular products. It is possible for consumers to resist conformity pressure and declare their uniqueness by the acquisition of less popular commodities among common and popular ones (Snyder et al., 2011). In the context of publicly visible products, consumers with higher score of NU express preferences towards less popular brands, product colours/materials/categories, in comparison to those with lower NU score. In addition, it is suggested that less popular consumption choice only happens if the choice of product is perceived as “good taste”. (Tepper et al., 2001.) Snyder et al. (2011) assume that the preference towards less popular commodities serve consumers’ need for public uniqueness rather than private uniqueness.

Continuation of using outdated or outmoded products discarded by most consumers is another means of satisfying desire for uniqueness (Lynn and Harris, 1997). Preowned, dispositioned and discontinued goods regarded as unique merchandise are regularly offered at second-hand, or thrift shops, which drive consumers with high NU to frequent such stores (Darley and Lim, 1993).

Choice of shopping venue. Consumers’ decision on shopping venue probably suggests their personal NU. Those with stronger strive for uniqueness tend to prefer smaller and less popular outlets that often present exclusive products, rather than the popular outlets that provide standard and ordinary merchandise. (Lynn and Harris, 1997.) Additionally, flea markets appear to be an ideal solution for acquiring “unique, not mass produced” merchandises that have personal stories (Sherry, 1990). Tepper (1997) proposes that products obtained from non-traditional shops fulfils the NU. Despite the increasing popularity of consumers pursuing NU by shopping from unique online stores, the accessibility to related research is limited.

Response to influence tactics. Influence tactics such as price reductions and exaggerated advertising promises are widely used to enhance product demands, and are extensively effective in manipulating consumer choice. Hence, consumers can tolerate themselves from conformity by resisting these tactics. (Snyder et al., 2011.) Simonson and Nowlis (2000) reveal that consumers with high score of NU do not endure as much of the effects of sale promotions and puffed-up advertising claims as those with low score do.

The pursuit of uniqueness through consumption. Considering that, people have different characteristics and numerous ways to distinguish themselves from the crowd, consumers might pursue uniqueness through alternative approaches, including through consumption (Lynn and Harris, 1997). It is argued that “the effects of individual differences in the NU on various consumer behaviours and dispositions would be mediated by a latent variable reflecting individual differences in the tendency to pursue uniqueness through consumption (Lynn and Harris, 1997; as cited in Snyder et al., 2011). Lynn and Harris’s (1997) research confirms the individual differences in both the general NU and the tendency to seek for uniqueness through consumption.

3.5. Synthesis of Theoretical Framework

The primary aim of this research is to understand uniqueness-seeking consumer behaviours in the context of online fashion consumption. In order to appreciate the behaviour, the paper firstly studies the interwoven relationship of different factors, namely consumer motivations for online fashion shopping, and CNFU, as the drivers of consumers’ pursuit for uniqueness in the sense of fashion. CNFU is a determinant motivates consumers to perform counter-conformity consumption behaviours to express and assure their identities. Together with the motives for online shopping for apparels, CNFU urges consumers to migrate their behaviour from offline to online environment.

The theoretical framework genuinely bases on Tian and colleagues’ (2001) works on behavioural dimensions, Holt’s (1995) studies on consumption typologies along with Lynn and Harris’s (1997) researches on consumers’ DUCP (Figure 6). In the light of the fact that assimilating – as a manifestation of integrating consumption typology, is irrelevant to the research context, it is excluded from the theoretical framework. Generally, consumers’ pursuit of uniqueness through online fashion consumption derives from underlying motives for fashion shopping online along with CNFU. To maintain their distinctiveness, consumers might make creative choices. For instance, consumers can involve themselves in production process of fashion products, or personalise or customise mass-produced items to plant their personal touch on the products. They can also appear as early adopters of new fashion and trends, or consume and display their possessions of scarce products, which are not universally available to the majority. Yet, scarce possession does not always

refer to items with high monetary value (Snyder, 1992). It might imply the consumption of unpopular brands, items with less popular features, and outmoded products.

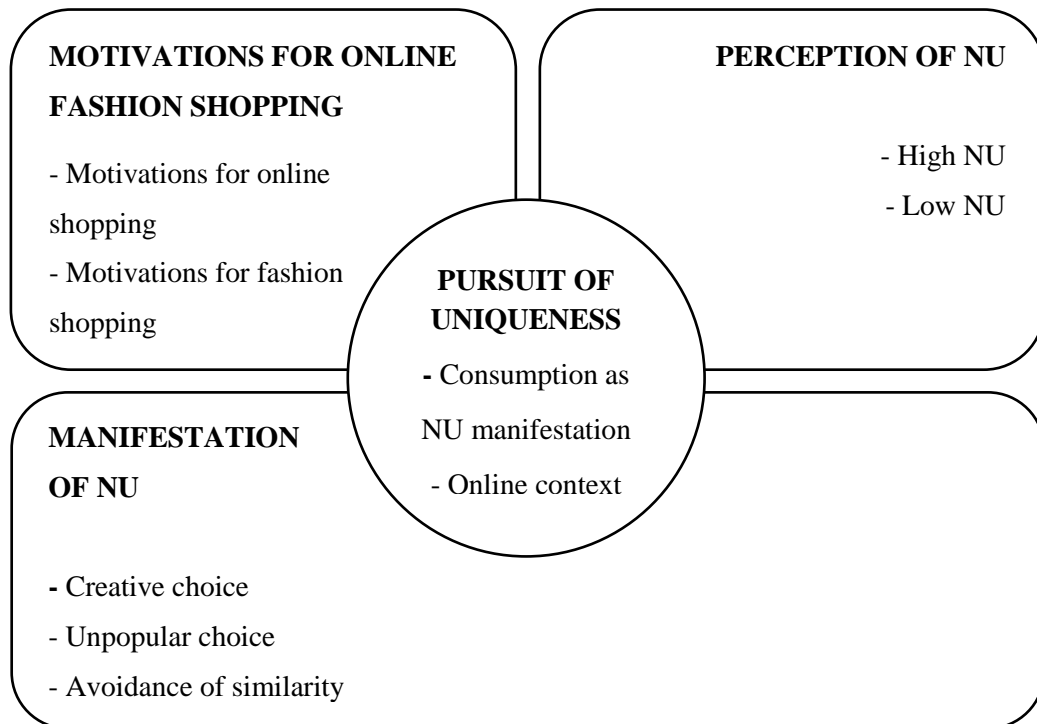


Figure 6. Synthesis of theoretical framework

Making unconventional choices also fulfil consumers' desire for distinctiveness. As mention above, unpopular alternatives involve the adoption of less favoured products, only if the relevant others perceive it as "good taste" (Tepper et al., 2001), which assist consumers in differentiating themselves from the mass. Shopping from less common venues, such as independent brand stores, flea markets, or auction, also reflects consumers' distinguishes. Likewise, consumers might achieve differentness by avoiding similarity stemming from influence tactics. The vast majority of consumers make purchase decisions under the influence of marketing tactics; hence developing a tolerance to such factors helps consumers to stand out. Consumers with high NU might also avoid the acquisition of commonplace brands or products, or indeed discard parts of their possessions if the items are broadly adopted. Some of these uniqueness-seeking behaviours might cluster, meaning a consumer might engage in more than one practice.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. An interpretivism approach

There are two approaches to inquire knowledge in scientific research: positivism and interpretivism perspectives. According to Hudson and Ozanne (1988), theoretical perspective based on research presumption and purpose of the author determines the selection of methodology. (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988.) These philosophical presumptions involve beliefs about the nature of reality and social beings (Ontological Assumptions) and of knowledge constitution (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988), or the correlation between the researcher and the reality (Epistemological Assumptions) (Carson et al., 2001).

Positivism perspective considers that the world is external (Carson et al., 2001), and that there is one single object reality to each research phenomenon or situation, which is independent from researcher's perspective, belief or opinion (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). The ultimate purpose of the research is to develop the comprehensive rules of the researched phenomenon to foresee future phenomena (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Hence, positivists choose a contained and structural research approach by classifying an apparent research topic, constructing relevant hypotheses, and by adopting an appropriate research methodology (Churchill, 1996; Carson et al., 2001). Positivist researchers need to remain neutral emotion to make clear division between reason and feeling, science and personal experience, and fact and value judgment. Positivist research mainly adopts statistical and mathematical techniques. (Carson et al., 2001.)

On another hand, interpretivism perspective realises reality as multiple, relative, mental and perceivable. Interpretivist concerns reality as an interdependent system that needs comprehensive inspection since it depends on contexts and diversifies regarding human perspectives. (Hudson & Ozanne, 1998.) Interpretivist research focuses on understanding and translating the meanings of human behaviours instead of generalising and predicting causes and effects, and on appreciating researching phenomenon within its context (Neuman, 2000; Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Or simply, "interpretivists seek to determine motives, meanings, reasons, and other subjective experiences that are both time- and context-bound" (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988, p. 511). Hence, interpretivists prefer a more

intimate and responsive research structures to structural ones (Carson et al., 2001). Interpretivist researchers start their work with certain insight of the context, yet presumes that the current knowledge is inadequate to design a rigid research model concerning the intricate and fluctuating nature of the perception of reality. It is significant that the researchers commit and directly connect with research objects to obtain an integrated understanding. (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988.)

This study adopts the approach of interpretivism to study consumer behaviours when pursuing uniqueness in the context of online fashion consumption due to two following reasons. Firstly, interpretivism fixates on understanding the act of consumption instead of predicting the purchase behaviour (Solomon, 2016), which is also the aim of this paper. Secondly and lastly, pursuit of uniqueness is a psychological phenomenon, which is sophisticated to objectively observe since observations are affected by personal value, theory and subjective judgment (Anderson, 1983). Consumers are under influence of not only the surrounding environment, yet also their subjective perception of the environment (Willis and Jost, 2007), which varies from consumer to consumer. Consumption behaviours are unique between two people, and/or even within the same consumer under different circumstances in respect with time and situation. In other words, consumer behaviours are subjective from the perspective of interpretivism approach. Although the approach is substantially subjective, it facilitates researchers in identifying common patterns. (Sahney, n.d.)

Ontologically, interpretivists believe in the idea of multiple realities considering the inter-relationship between reality and consumer perception, and the perception varies from consumer to consumer (Hudson and Ozanne, 1998; Shankar and Goulding, 2001; Cova and Elliott, 2008). The perception of uniqueness subjected to interdependent motives diversifies from one consumer to another. The motives include consumer motivation for online and fashion shopping, and CNFU. In other words, consumer perception underlies these motivations. In addition, interpretivism emphasises the social construct of reality achieved through interaction of consumers (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Shankar and Goulding, 2001; Cova and Elliott, 2008). Consumers behave actively and interact with each other to form their environment (Hudson and Ozanne, 1998). Interpretivist approach sees uniqueness competition as a factor that drives consumers to interact with related others to show their selves as extraordinary individuals.

Epistemologically, interpretivist approach concentrates on generating particularistic understanding of time- and context-bound phenomenon (Kocyigit, 2013). This study pursues the comprehension of consumer uniqueness-seeking behaviours in the context of online fashion retailing, rather than generalising consumer behaviour in all contexts. In addition, the study aims at investigating and identifying a personal construct in the context instead of explaining the relationship between the motives. The researcher analyses the motivations associated with the consumer behaviours. Furthermore, interpretivists see themselves as the research project participant since they believe that knowledge should be accessed internally in a subjective position (Cova and Elliott, 2008). Consumers communicate their developed uniqueness perception through their stories. The researcher then act as an interpreter who decodes the provided details into meaning concepts. Hence, to sum up, interpretivism is an appropriate approach and research strategy to study consumer pursuit of uniqueness through consumption behaviour in online fashion industry.

4.2. Qualitative method

Considering the purpose of this research, the qualitative method is adopted so that the researcher can observe the phenomenon from consumers' perspective and discover their experience with uniqueness-seeking behaviour. Qualitative method aims at facilitating researchers to conceive the how and why of consumer behaviours using data obtained through visual and verbal channels (Long and Godfrey, 2004), which is troublesome to demonstrate in numbers and figures. Qualitative research refers to data collecting practices that are more natural and flexible comparing to quantitative approach, including interviews, focus groups, ethnographies, case studies, or grounded-theory. However, this research approach requires more time and resources during data collecting process; and retrieved data cannot be quantified, which results in challenging data interpretation practice (Stefura, 2011). Moreover, qualitative research presents less credibility (Stefura, 2011), or in other words, validity and reliability (Alam, 2005). This paper attempt to assure the credibility of the qualitative research by complying with a predefined framework, and following transparent processes and procedures to provide trustworthy explanations and consistent conclusions in comparison with the initial description of the phenomenon.

To provide answers to the research question, the research collect empirical data by employing in-depth interview as a qualitative tool. According to Seidman (2013, p. 9), “At the root of in-depth interview is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience”. In-depth interview refers to face-to-face encounters between researchers and respondents conducted to understand respondents’ perspective on research phenomenon expressed in their own words (Taylor et al., 2016). Even though this method is time-consuming, expensive (Tuten and Urban, 2001) and labour-intensive (Guion et al., 2011), it is widely adopted by researchers within the scope of consumer research. In-depth interview method produces rich description of research phenomenon (Guion et al., 2011) through detailed and open discussion. Obtained rich description assists the researcher in identifying consumer behaviour when pursuing uniqueness in the context of fashion industry in online environment. To sum up, promised detailed observation from consumers’ perspective together with rich description derived from in-depth interview explain the researcher’s choice of this method for the study.

4.3. Data generation

4.3.1. Choosing respondents

The author adopts purposeful sampling technique to determine the selection of interviewees. Purposeful sampling refers to the act of “selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” in accordance with pre-defined characteristics that offers an adequate demonstration of data (Patton, 1990, p. 169). This research targets respondents who have previous experience in online shopping for fashion items. In consideration of the purpose of achieving comprehension of consumer behaviour in the research context, familiarity with the online environment is mandatory. Besides this criterion, there are no other limitations namely ages, genders, nationalities, occupations, income levels, or NU degrees. It is believed that without the limitations in terms of demographic variables, the author is capable of reaching out to a greater diversity of mind-sets and perceptions of NU, as well as achieving a broader outlook of sets of consumer behaviour performed to pursue uniqueness. Individuals from different age groups employed in different occupation earning different income levels might engage in the pursuit of uniqueness differently. Likewise, as abovementioned, individuals from different nationalities and cultural

backgrounds have distinctive interpretation of the NU as well as its manifestations. Similarly, the research does not fixate on individuals with higher score on NU scale exclusively. Even though individuals with lower or moderate NU may not strongly express exhibitions of NU, their perspectives and consumption behaviour are noteworthy. In brief, the selection of respondents are solely based on one criterion: previous experience with online shopping for fashion products. Furthermore, the author also utilises the snowball sampling technique to obtain access to new contacts by asking respondents for referral to their friends or friends-of-friends.

4.3.2. Conducting interviews

As targeting respondents were determined, the author made first contacts with potential participants whilst instituting a protocol comprising details of respondents, outlined conversation flow, major discussion themes, and essential interview techniques. To ensure the confidence of the protocol, the author conducted two pilot testing interviews before the actual ones. The author constructs the study as a semi-structured interview – one of the most efficient, convenient (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009), and responsive (Rubin and Rubin, 2012) vehicles to collect data. Semi-structured approach consists of established themes instructing open-ended interview questions. Although the interview protocol includes guidelines of primary questions in respect of research themes, the author did not entirely follow the questioning sequence yet the order was based on participants' responses to refrain from the author's established framework of logic (Alam, 2005). Respondents were encouraged to share their understanding, perceptions, and experiences regarding the research phenomenon, and to discuss perceived substantial themes further. Under certain circumstances, the author instructed additional explanation on emerging intriguing topics mentioned by the respondents. In order to validate accuracy of the collected data, the author constantly repeated and confirmed with the participants, and obligated clarification if needed. Alongside with taking notes on essential details, the author recorded the interviews for later comparison and interpretation with the awareness and consent of the respondents.

Within a period of two weeks, ten semi-structured interview sections were conducted (Table 1). As mentioned, respondents are fashion consumers familiar with the online environment from different backgrounds in terms of ages (ranging from 19 to 31), genders,

nationalities (Vietnamese, Finnish, American, Chinese, and Singaporean), occupations (student, full-time employee, and part-time employee), NU degrees (high, mild, and low), and geographical location (respondents reside in Vietnam, Finland, and the United States of America). Interviews conducted with participants located outside Finland was organised through online chats or video calls. Those inhabited in Finland were invited to face-to-face meetings at various revenues supporting the proceeding and documentation of interviews.

Throughout the interview sections, the author followed particular interview techniques to keep the discussions organic and responsive. In order to maintain the genuineness of the conversation, the author kept suggestive comments or personal points of view to the minimum. During the interviews, respondents clearly expressed their perception and consciousness of their NU degree together with corresponding manifestation of NU; hence, no preliminary evaluation on consumers' degree of NU was undertaken. The assessment of degree of concern for uniqueness was performed in respect of consumers' apprehensions of their own NU alongside with equivalent behaviours.

4.4. Data analysis

To make sense of collected data, the author converted recorded conversation into texts. Transcripts of the interview recordings were studied to identify key notes and themes. As transcribed data is unsystematic, the author classified data into sections in accordance with the predefined research purpose and questions. Besides re-reading the transcripts, the author also went through the records several times to capture the overall ambience of the conversations and understanding of perspectives of the respondents (Flint and Woodruff, 2001). Throughout the interpretation of the data, the author determined frequent similarity in consumers' stories as well as identified and associated emerging concepts or topics with discussed theories (Bernard, 2000).

Table 1. Informant list

No.	Pseudonym	Gender/Age	Interview date	Interview length	Interview method
1	Taylor	F24	13.3.2018	32 mins	Face-to-face
2	Dennis	M28	16.3.2018	41 mins	Voice call
3	Haley	F29	17.3.2018	57 mins	Online chat
4	Annie	F32	18.3.2018	50 mins	Online chat
5	Ian	M31	21.3.2018	22 mins	Face-to-face
6	Lacy	F20	22.3.2018	27 mins	Face-to-face
7	Tracy	F31	24.3.2018	34 mins	Face-to-face
8	Natalie	F19	27.3.2018	43 mins	Voice call
9	Theodore	M21	27.3.2018	50 mins	Voice call
10	Janice	F26	28.3.2018	42 mins	Voice call

5. PURSUIT OF UNIQUENESS THROUGH CONSUMPTION

This chapter demonstrates the key findings from assembled data. The findings answer to the research questions regarding consumers' motivations for online fashion shopping, their perception of uniqueness and NU, and their pursuit of uniqueness through consumption behaviours of fashion products in online environment. The author conducts the interpretation of data from the consumer perspectives, and presents the result in accordance with the main themes determined in the theoretical framework. In addition to the construct of analysed data, discussions of manifestations of NU are classified by the degree of NU perceived by consumers.

5.1. Consumer motivations

Motivations for fashion shopping online vary among consumers. Concerning the variables of individual differences, consumers perform online fashion shopping to satisfy different underlying needs and/or desires. Some are monetary benefits driven while others seek for practical benefits. Through the interviews, the author uncovers the following five major motivations that drives consumers to shop online: convenience, product availability, flexible return policy, price, and avoidance of store atmosphere.

5.1.1. Convenience

Convenience is the dominant motive when reasoning the choice of online environment as a shopping medium. According to Järvenpää and Todd (1997), one of the most influential motivations that advocate consumers to shop on the Internet is convenience. Consumers regard the convenience motive in various aspects. Some recognise online shopping as a travelling free solution.

"I can buy stuff at home with just a click." – **Dennis**

"It is easier to buy online, especially in sale seasons." – **Lacy**

"I do not have to travel." – **Annie**

“First, I do not have to go out.” – Theodore

The reduction of travelling activities contributes to the impression of saving time when shopping online. Time-effective oriented consumers are inclined to accomplish their shopping activities in shorter period, and prefer alternatives facilitating time save (Hansen and Jensen, 2009). As store location is irrelevant in online shopping, demand for travelling as well as time needed to travel diminish; hence, the online environment becomes an efficient shopping means as consumers consent in Kim and Kim’s (2004) study.

“Second, it is more time-saving. Time spent for the whole thing is a lot less. Especially when you do not have to waste hours travelling back and forth.” – Theodore

“Normally it takes me about an hour to travel to the stores and back, without counting the time it takes to go from stores to stores. And of course I have to dress up before going out, so it would take me another hour. Instead, I can save tons of hours by shopping at home, in my most comfortable state.” – Tracy

In the vein of time convenient, purchasing from online is beneficial through offered product delivery service. According to Brown’s (1989) five-dimension of convenience framework, home delivery of products provides consumers with acquisition of purchased items at their convenient time.

“It was delivered to my front door.” – Annie

“Because of the delivery matters...it is more convenient and quicker buying from online stores than from physical stores.” – Janice

“I have things delivered to my doorstep most of the time.” – Taylor

Furthermore, there are cases where consumers see shopping online as similar as visiting brick-and-mortars to try clothes on rather than to make actual purchases. Consumers order desired items because they prefer to experience the try-on at their comfort. Besides, it is simpler for consumers to double-check if the items complement their current wardrobe.

“I can buy many items and try them on at home and return it later.” – Taylor

*“It more convenient in the sense that I can purchase stuff and have them delivered, and try them on at home. I can also see if they go with the items I already have.” – **Haley***

In addition to the time-related benefits, consumers also refer to online shopping as an effort-saving option. Consumers perceive that they have more control and freedom when shopping online. Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2001) reveal that consumers find shopping on the Internet more enjoyable as they are not subject to any social protocol conformity. Shopping online offers consumers a relaxing and personalised environment (Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2001) where they can behave at their pleasure and be in their “most comfortable state”. In addition, The Internet simplifies the practices of comparing brands, products, and prices.

*“It effortless to compare different brands that offers similar items.” – **Natalie***

*“It is easier to compare prices with just some mouse clicks.” – **Ian***

5.1.2. Product availability

Product availability refers to consumer accessibility to desired products, in desired form, colour or size. Consumers encountering product availability problem, or so-called out-of-stock problem, find the issue very frustrating, especially when it frequents (Olofsson, 2006). They are likely to switch to substitute brands, items, or retail shops, and/or postpone or give up the purchase (Corsten and Gruen, 2004). Consumers might also opt for online shopping to avoid the problem of out-of-stock.

*“Stock availability is higher in online stores.” – **Haley***

*“It is really annoying to go to a store, like retail store in Helsinki, and then you find out that there are nice clothes, but there is no size and you have to wait for two weeks to come back.” – **Ian***

*“It sometimes happens that the stores do not have my size.” – **Lacy***

Online outlets normally notify consumers with the availability of products in relation to sizes and colours. In stock-out situations, certain online stores allow consumers to decide

whether they want to receive information regarding the availability of their desired products via either email or SMS text. Additionally, consumers could also use the Internet to seek for items or brands that are unavailable locally. There are international brands that locate their physical shops in only certain parts of the world; hence, the purchase of these brands ought to happen online. Besides, consumers seeking for products from foreign independent brands can utilise online shopping to acquire the desired items.

“There are things that are not available from offline marketplace then I have to search for it online.” – Theodore

“Not all of the items are available in Finland, which is why I have to go to online store.” – Taylor

“There are brands you cannot find in Finland, for example, Forever 21. They have stores in other European countries, like Germany, the Netherlands, or the UK, but not in Finland yet. So my only choice is to buy online.” – Janice

Besides, consumers report that they are able to find in online outlets items from previous seasons or collections that are not on-shelf in physical shops.

“I can find some items from past seasons online sometimes, which cannot be found in brick-and-mortars most of the time.” – Tracy

“There was a time I wanted to buy a pair of jeans I saw in the online store, so I went to the store to try it on, but they told me that they did not have it in stock at that time, so I guessed it was from the previous collection. I ordered it online anyway; I had no other choice at the time.” – Janice

5.1.3. Flexible return policy

In addition to offered home delivery of purchased products, online stores allow consumers to return the items free of charge, or sometime with a small returning fee. As mentioned above, there are consumers who like to order and try clothes on in private. One of the reasons that encourage the behaviour is the flexibility of the return and/or exchange policy. For instance, H&M, Zara, and Mango allow consumers to return purchased items without

any damages, and request refunds within thirty days after receiving the shipment confirmation, or the orders. Thus, consumers are able to order, try on at home, and return the products if they displease with the items by chance.

*“I can return it without paying additional charges if it does not fit or I just do not like it anymore.” – **Dennis***

*“It is common nowadays that most of online stores allow you to return purchased items for free.” – **Janice***

*“The return policy has become more flexible and convenient lately.” – **Haley***

However, returning methods differs from one brand to another. Most of the brands allow free store return, meaning that consumers return the purchased items at physical outlet free of charge. Yet, there are cases where consumers are liable for postal fee provided that they wish to use the postal service.

*“It is a lot easier to return clothes lately. For example, you can bring them back to store normally as when you buy them from brick-and-mortars, or you can also use the envelop included in the package to return them at Posti. That is what makes H&M outruns Zara or Mango.” - **Tracy***

5.1.4. Price

As the online environment facilitates the comparison of product features and prices practices, consumers can easily acquire products at the best-offered prices. Price plays a dominant role in determining consumer-purchasing rate (Gabor and Granger, 1961). Price conscious consumers are inclined to low price search and purchase, and respond to special sales (Shoham and Brencic, 2004). In fact, consumers with high price consciousness see low price as the determinant element when making purchase (Kirk, 1992).

*“I would favour anywhere that have better prices, so I would say I spend more in e-tailers.” – **Dennis***

“Price is another important thing. You can easily find good discounts on the Internet.” – Ian

Furthermore, there are consumers who find it challenging to ignore bargains. They tend to overlook the actual cost of products and have the urge to obtain them at the temporarily reduced price (Gabor and Granger, 1961). Besides seasonal deals aligning with in-store promotional calendar, online outlets offers discounts that are exclusively available for online shoppers. The author believes that the implementation of online exclusive deal generates a win-win situation where consumers could acquire items that are limited to targeted promotion recipients, while businesses benefit from saving inventory costs of products, especially those from previous seasons. Housing outdated items in central warehouses helps lengthen the product life cycle without diminishing its profit margin. Consequently, consumers who are not in need for the most updated items are subject to significant savings acquiring such products.

“There are deals that you cannot find in brick-and-mortars.” – Tracy

5.1.5. Avoidance of store atmosphere

Consumers adopt online shopping in order to avoid the crowd atmosphere at traditional shops. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) discuss the significance of physical and social surroundings to consumer emotional states. To certain extent, consumers find shopping in-store unpleasant due to numerous factors, such as overcrowded environment, long queues to dressing room or cashier, unorganised products, and other distractions. The study of Hui and Bateson (1991) reveals that consumers disclose negative emotional effects experiencing overcrowding in the context of service encounter. Consumers claim that the undesirable in-store settings are amplified sometimes during promotion seasons.

“To avoid the store atmosphere, definitely when it is sale seasons.” – Taylor

“At least spending time at home on your sofa is better than going out and getting stuck in queues and crowd.” – Theodore

“It is terrible shopping in brick-and-mortars, especially in sale seasons. You will see clothes and accessories everywhere, even on the floor sometimes.” – Haley

Additionally, consumers who do not favour direct contact with store personnel may turn to online shopping. There are cases where consumers feel violated by overenthusiastic retail salespersons. Consumers report the feeling of lack of freedom and being under surveillance when accompanied by sales assistants throughout their shopping trip. They also express their anxious towards initiating and maintaining conversation with the in-store personnel. The linear relationship between surroundings and consumer emotions, and the need for avoidance of direct communication with store staff or other shoppers encourage consumers to go to online outlets. In the online environment, consumers have opportunities to learn fully about products and its features (e.g. available size and colour, material, et cetera.) without assistance from store personnel.

“Less direct communication and more overview about the product.” – Dennis

5.1.6. Summary of consumer motivation

Gathered from consumer responses, there are five major themes regarding the motivations. Consumers explain the reasons motivating them to shop online including convenience motivation, availability of products that are unavailable elsewhere, flexibility of return policy, price, and avoidance of shop atmosphere. The key points are encapsulated in the following Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of consumer motivations

Motivations	Description	Representative quotes
Convenience	Without the need for travelling, consumers perceive online shopping as a time convenient solution. By shopping online, consumers can have their orders home delivered and experience the fitting at home at their comfort. Their shopping experience is further facilitated by the ability to effortlessly compare brands and prices results in acquisition of items at the best price.	<p><i>"I can buy stuff at home with just a click."</i> – Dennis</p> <p><i>"Time spent for the whole thing is a lot less. Especially when you do not have to waste hours travelling back and forth."</i> – Theodore</p> <p><i>"It is more convenient and quicker buying from online stores than from physical stores."</i> – Janice</p> <p><i>"I can buy many items and try them on at home and return it later."</i> – Taylor</p> <p><i>"It is easier to compare prices with just some mouse clicks."</i> – Ian</p>
Product availability	Online outlets provide consumers with maximized product availability and wider product variability consisting of outdated products and special items that are unavailable in the market.	<i>"Stock availability is higher in online stores."</i> – Haley
Flexible return policy	Considering the fact that online shoppers cannot try or feel items before making purchases, flexible return and refund request policies motivate consumers to buy online.	<i>"The return policy has become more flexible and convenient lately."</i> – Haley
Price	Since the online environment simplifies the practices of comparing products and prices, good prices and discounts are at exposure to price conscious consumers.	<i>"There are deals that you cannot find in brick-and-mortars."</i> – Tracy
Avoidance of store atmosphere	Consumers with the need to avoid shop atmosphere, such as, crowd, long queue, direct communication with store staff or other shoppers tend to prefer to shop online.	<i>"At least spending time at home on your sofa is better than going out and getting stuck in queues and crowd."</i> – Theodore

5.2. Perception of NU

According to the empirical data, consumers are categorised into two groups: those with high, and low or mild NU score. As aforementioned, the degree of NU varies with respect to individual differences (Snyder and Fromkin, 1977, 1980). Thus, consumers with different score on the NU scale express different manifestation of NU. Throughout the study, the author relatively interprets consumers' concern for uniqueness in respect of their own recognition and manifestation of NU. In most of the cases, consumers already establish self-awareness of their own degree of NU and behave correspondingly. The following sub-sections classify consumers with reference to their exhibition of NU.

5.2.1. High NU

Consumers with high NU score express strong reaction towards similarity to their peers. Sameness in fashion term causes negative feelings and thoughts of the consumers, which urges them to seek for more distinction to defend their uniqueness and personality.

"I do not want to wear the same clothes as someone else." – **Ian**

"I do not like it when others look similar to me." – **Annie**

In addition to the resistance to uniformity with their peers, consumers keep a rather receptive inclination on being extraordinary. Opinion and judgment of another is overlooked preferably as long as consumers are comfortable being themselves in their clothing of choice.

"I am not afraid to use things that other people might not use." – **Theodore**

"It feels special when you are the only one at the place at the time." – **Dennis**

"I am not worry what other people think about. If I think that it is good then I am going to use it." – **Taylor**

High uniqueness consumers have different perspectives of uniqueness and NU. Even though they share the understanding of definition of uniqueness, there is a diversity of components constructing their differentness. Consumers define uniqueness as being a one-of-a-kind by being consistent on certain presences, owning exclusionary possessions, or adding personal touch and creativity to the ordinary items. Yet, a limit to the exception is essential so that the specialness and social norms do not clash.

*“Being unique means that I am different from others. I think that if you do something your own ways consistently, then it becomes your uniqueness. It does not always mean something good, but it has to be consistent.” – **Dennis***

*“I think owning something that others do not have makes me unique. Or that if I adopt styles from other people, I like to customise it to better suit my personality and body shape so that the outfit has my personal touch, then I’ll be unique.” – **Taylor***

*“It depends on how everything works together. It can be different and reflect the creativity of the owner, but it should be decent and there are some kind of limitation in terms of aesthetics” – **Theodore***

However, the author notices that besides the value of prominence, high NU consumers also take into consideration the importance of context of surroundings.

*“To stand out from the crowd, I must first dress to suit the context. For example, it is not appropriate to stand out for attention by wearing a T-shirt and sweatpants to a formal party.” – **Taylor***

*“Even though I want to feel different, it is still appropriate to be on the same level with the rest of the people.” – **Ian***

5.2.2. Low or mild NU

On the other hand, consumers with low or mild NU appreciate uniqueness in slightly different approaches. In order to be unique, consumers give precedence to the comfort and the degree to what the items are well suited to their personality and physique. Additionally, they also consider and attire respectively to the surroundings context of the attending

happenings. In other words, dressing accordingly to the persons' characters and situations is one alternative to achieve differentness.

"I am of a rational and realistic person." – **Haley**

"It is more about the context. I tend to dress for the context than to just stand out or be different." – **Lacy**

"I am more into comfortability. I mean something simple and elegant." – **Natalie**

"It is not like wearing luxurious or totally different from the rest. I would prefer something comfortable and well suited. Because if I am wearing an outfit that perfectly suits me and makes me better looking, people will of course remember me." – **Janice**

Additionally, consumers with low concern with uniqueness perceive similarity to others from a different perspective. The sameness in choice of fashion reflects the resemblance in taste and perhaps characteristics. Indeed, consumers also exhibit positive feelings and reactions towards the likeness between themselves and others.

"I find it funny seeing someone wearing similar clothes. It is like you find your long lost friend in a way." – **Natalie**

"Actually it is kind of amusing to have someone sharing similar taste, is not it?" – **Haley**

5.3. Manifestation of NU

Consumers of different degrees of NU demonstrate the manifestation of NU variously. The current research is conducted upon the frameworks developed by Tian et al.'s (2001) three consumption behavioural dimension, Holt's (1995) two typologies of consumption, and Lynn and Harris's (1997) findings on the pursuit of uniqueness through consumption to apprehend consumer uniqueness-seeking behaviours. It captures the approaches consumers take to express their uniqueness and identity, and the justification of the performed practices through the construct of non-conformity behaviours. The following sections describe and explain the undertaken tactics by classifying the behaviours emerged

from consumer response data into creative choice, unpopular choice, and avoidance of similarity. Additionally, comparison of consumers' behaviours between online and offline environment is concisely discussed at the end of each sub-section.

5.3.1. Creative choice

Personalisation and customisation. Prior to the hit of mass production, customisation is the original manufacturing technique of clothing. Fashion products are handmade by tailors and dressmakers to fit consumers individually, which ceases when mass production evolves. (Mulqueen, 2017.) The development of technology provides consumers with access to latest fashion trends and styles promoted by public figures, which are mostly unaffordable to the average (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood, 2006). The craving to acquire items similar to those on catwalks or in magazines immediately at a more affordable expense prompts consumers to engage in fast fashion industry (Linden, 2016). However, consumers also want to avoid excessive similarity to another deriving from the NU. This results in the acquisition of limited edition of fast fashion products (Linden, 2016). In addition, fashion market witnesses the change of consumers demand for customised products (Mulqueen, 2017). Consumers with high NU declare their identities through the act of personalising and customising.

“I have some items customised just for me and I am pretty sure that is something that no one else could have.” – Taylor

Personalising, or customising, is relatively popular in fashion. The amount of personalising fast-fashion product ideas retrieved from the Internet is massive. A consumer may practice customising by adding personal design or feature to a ready-to-ware pair of jeans purchased from, for instance, Zara or Mango, to declare their individuality and/or aesthetic sense. The performance of customising an item of clothing or apparel can happen prior to or post purchase. It is possible that the consumer decorates an owned pair of sneakers with a touch of personality him/herself by painting or drawing on it, or customises it online before making payment for the shoes. There are many online outlets allow consumers to design their own shoes with various combinations of colours of choice and names or signatures printed on the products. Similarly, the consumer can also have their design of

choice printed on t-shirts, jeans, or any other fashion items. Personalised or customised products, apparently, are unique.

The practices of personalisation and customisation share similar major characteristics of making products individual or according to personal specifications in terms of endowment or taste. Personalisation requires no consumer interference in designing process, whilst customisation invites consumers to take part in the creation of products (Wind and Rangaswamy, 2001). Tseng and Piller (2003) point out that personalisation is a form of customisation. As aforementioned, mass customisation empowered by technologies combines the finest features of customisation and mass production to fulfil consumer needs for both affordability and uniqueness. Even though mass customisation offers limited options, it provides consumers with control on appearance, fit, style, and quality of products. (Kusnezov, 2012.)

“Customising products is rather simple online. I have customised and ordered a few pairs of shoes from Nike ID a short while ago. You can choose the colour you want, mixing them the way you like, they also let you print your name or initials instead of logo on your place of choice. They even let you customise to the smallest detail like heel clip or midsole. And everything happens online.” – Dennis

However, there is possibility that mass customisation fails to satisfy consumers with high uniqueness concern fully since the original design and most parts of product remain.

“I know some brands let customers to have some slogan or something printed on the backpack...but I am not really interested in that because the design is still the same and it is not really something that is fully customised for me.” – Ian

“There are stores that let you to customise your clothes with your design or with their ready-made designs; you can choose whatever you want. But the product variety are not many. I mean you can only customise some very basic items.” – Haley

On the other hand, lower NU consumers express concern towards being dissimilar to the mass adopting the practices of personalisation or customisation. Consumers are slightly

indifferent when discuss the possibility to personalise mass-produced items either using offered services or doing on their own.

“It is OK for me to have my items customised, but not too much. I like to have my initials printed on shoes or backpack, or add some small details to the original design, but just that, or else it would be too much for me.” – Natalie

“I have been watching quite many do-it-yourself videos and actually thinking that I will try it someday, but sometimes these things take lots of effort, and I am a bit sceptical on how people will think when they see me in these.” – Annie

In addition to the help of technology and professionals to acquire personalised apparels, consumers could customise fashion items themselves with the support of countless do-it-yourself tutorials available across the Internet. Besides, online publications, popular bloggers and vloggers – video bloggers, share fashion inspired tips and ideas widely. They are commonly accessible to consumers free of charge. Additionally, it is noticed that high concern for uniqueness also enjoy customising their current garments themselves.

“I browse the Internet for outfit ideas sometimes.” – Janice

“It helps sometimes to look through the websites when you run out of ideas.” – Tracy

“It is fun to go through the Internet for ideas of refreshing the items that have been buried at the bottom of my closet.” – Taylor

Display of possessions. Display of possessions is easier on the online environment. It is realised that presenting fashion possessions in the offline environment may not reach as many audiences as in the online setting. For instance, a consumer dressing up nicely to a happening is appreciated only by people passing by on the street and those attending the event. Those who are not part of the occurrence might miss the outfit. However, posting a picture of the person in the outfit onto social media before, during, or after the event ensures the chance of spreading the desired images of the consumer to everyone in his/her network circle. Interviewed consumers share similar thoughts regarding using the Internet as a vehicle to communicate their message to a broader range of audience. Additionally,

endorsements from friends and related others encourage consumers to be more active sharing similar posts onto social media. Throughout the discussions, it is noticeable that consumers perceived as having low NU express identical behaviours of displaying possessions on social networks.

“I sometimes upload pictures of me wearing some outfits that I really like or very special to me onto social media like Instagram or Facebook. To be honest, the likes and comments complimenting my appearance I receive motivate me to post more on social media.” –

Lacy

“I love making short movies which I star in it, and of course I like to dress up nicely for the videos. It is not like any expensive stuff, but something nice and somewhat different. Then share them on the social media.” – **Taylor**

“I share to my Instagram account things related to fashion, like, my outfit of the day, fashion tips I collect somewhere on the Internet, and stuff like that, that I think are nice.” – **Janice**

While sharing own possessions onto social media platforms communicates consumers' messages about actual or desired personalities and identities, posting possessions of others or products available on the market indicates different meanings. Consumers want to show their interest in the industry, loyalty or affiliation to certain brands, or communicate their desire for the products. Considering the scarcity or specialness of the products, consumers might look forward to illustrating their personal image, identities, and/or sense of uniqueness.

“I run many social media accounts to show my special interest in sneakers. I mainly share pictures of the sneakers of my own – those that I think are above average, along with those I found on the Internet that I think are exceptional and I want to have.” – **Dennis**

Innovativeness. Similar to display of possessions, pursuing fashion innovativeness is simpler online. The increasing amount of fashion magazines, blogs, sites, and similar resources provides consumers with fresh information and update on new trends and styles. Taking into account the proficiency of in-time update of online publications, it offers

consumers instant insight into development and innovation of fashion. Publications also keep consumers to stay up-to-date on trends by issuing summation on well-known fashion shows around the globe. It is observed that the need for being updated with fashion drives most of the consumers from both high and low uniqueness concern groups to behave in the same manner.

*“There are lots of sites update new fashion all the time. They keep their readers updated with recaps and reviews of designs from famous runways around the world. Those designs from fashion show do not necessary to fit my style, but it is good to be updated with the fashion world.” – **Haley***

Likewise, updates on trends and styles are available across social media platforms. While fashion innovators and leaders use social networks to share their favourite trends together with ability to keep up with fashion movement, fellow fashion followers adopt social media to remain updated and look for inspirations.

*“I follow some Instagram accounts of famous fashionistas to keep myself inspired and up-to-date with trends.” – **Natalie***

*“I observe trends at the time, colour trends of the year, or styles recommended by fashion vloggers.” – **Taylor***

Consumers also reveal another source of information on fashion trends, which is online retail stores. By “window shopping” on the online shops, consumers can keep themselves updated with recent styles. Most of online outlets have editorial or new collection sections where they present trendy and popular items. Browsing the section provides consumers with knowledge on current fashion trends. Besides, scanning the “on-shelf” products also give consumers the overall glimpse of the fashion market situation. Consumers also mention the use of signing up for alerts from online retailers to keep up with trends and new inventory.

*“I frequent many online stores not to always buy stuff from them but to also see the new trends and styles.” – **Annie***

“The first thing I do whenever visiting a web store is to always check out the editorial or new collection section.” – Tracy

“I sign up for notification emails from quite many online stores, which helps me to easily update trends.” – Janice

Nevertheless, the need to be aware of trends does not always associate with the adoption of new fashion. One of the major discussed reasons is the high price of the new products. Consumers tend to evaluate the worthiness of the high-priced products against their actual interest in the items, and its likeliness to complement their styles. In case that the products are too much over-priced, the consumers lose interest in them.

“I only buy the new released products if they are affordable and I really like it. Some are just ridiculously expensive.” – Dennis

“Items from new collections come with higher price than average of course. Even though I like to keep up with trends, some are not really worth its expensiveness, or just does not really go with my style.” – Annie

“It depends on the price. I do not want to spend too much on something just to be fashionable and special if it is too expensive. It is more reasonable to spend an enough amount on something that make you stand out in your own way.” – Ian

5.3.2. Unpopular choice

Consumption of less popular products. As discussed above, consuming products that are unpopular instead of trendy ones helps consumers with their NU. Consumers with high NU express stronger affection for unpopular or uncommon items. As discussed earlier, consumers have high tendency to neglect judgment of either significant ones or passers-by. They seek for items that have specific traits, such as, colours, shapes, materials or certain additional details. Considering that, unpopular apparels are undesirable to the majority, thus acquiring and consuming such items could ensure the uniqueness of consumers.

*“I normally go for something that most of my friends or people I know think are unfashionable. Yet, they are fashionable to me.” – **Dennis***

*“I like to look for items that are not sold universally, have special colours, or are not so popular or unavailable locally.” – **Annie***

*“Not many people want unpopular stuff, so owning one might be something outstanding.” – **Theodore***

Acquisition and consumption of particular products might transmit the messages carrying identities of consumers. However, besides from the divergence of the products, it is debatable that visibility of the consumption behaviour matters. Inappropriate targeted audiences might not entirely appreciate the effects of the consumption of uncommon or less popular products. Consuming the items in an environment filled with people sharing adequate comprehension of the products alleviates its symbolic value. For instance, it is demonstrated that wearing a pair of sneakers in atypical colour design might have impact on the way another perceives personality and sense of fashion of the consumer, yet only those with insight about the sneakers recognise the specialness of the item and its owner. In other words, the surroundings of the consumers have significant impact on the uniqueness of the persons.

*“A limited item popular in a society only makes you outstanding if people from that society see or know that you use the item.” – **Dennis***

There are approaches taken by high NU consumers in order to seek for unpopular products. Consumers tend to avoid shopping from popular brands and concentrate on looking for other values of products, such as higher quality and durability, from small and independent brands. Refraining from best-selling section of online outlets also provides consumers with higher opportunity to discover less popular items. Consumers also suggest that there are probability to find uncommon apparels from uncommon sources. The sources are going to be discussed further in the next sub-section.

*“I avoid those really popular brands. I try to find some really good quality brands that are not very popular.” – **Ian***

“I do not like to shop in the best-selling section. It gives away the items that tons of other people are wearing.” – Taylor

“Most of my “uncommon” items are bought from uncommon place.” – Annie

Nevertheless, concerning the shopping setting, consumers find it rather difficult to identify less popular products online compared to traditional shops. Since consumers are unable to determine the popularity of products from the in-store evidences, such as responses of other shoppers towards certain items, or product availability. Impression of product popularity develops upon the interest of other shoppers on the items: the more people attracted to the items, the more popular they are. Similarly, in-store availability of a product could reflect its popularity. For instance, the huge amount of on-shelf item of a product means that the product is in high demand and needs frequent re-stock, or that the product is undesirable and has been on-shelf for a while. In the online environment, especially in brand stores, such as Zara, Mango, or H&M, it is claimed that the evidences are inaccessible; hence, consumers are not able to differ less popular from popular products.

“It is a lot easier to find a not so popular item in physical stores. You can tell by checking the amount of the items that are on-shelf or the number of people consider buying it. But it is not the same online, so basically I have to go with my instinct.” – Theodore

According to the author’s observation, the clarity of product popularity is comparable, and slightly improved to some extent, when shopping from online retailers. Most of the retailers support customer review section in addition to the best-selling function. The amount of review of previous consumers indicates the product popularity. Utilisation of the function could enhance the performance of consumers seeking for uncommon or less popular products to acquire desired items.

On the other hand, consumers with lower NU assert hesitation and/or neutrality towards less popular products. Besides the anxiety of excessive dissimilarity, underlying reasons of low popularity of the products, such as perceived aesthetic and ethical issues, provoke consumer disinclination.

“I am a bit unsure about unpopular items. They are unpopular for a reason. They are either unfashionable, or unattractive.” - Janice

In the meantime, other consumers recognised as having low uniqueness concern confirm their interest in less popular or uncommon items. Similar to those with high NU, consumers shop from brands selling exclusive and original products unavailable from other sources. Acquisition of garments from previous seasons delivers equivalent effect. Consuming exclusive and outmoded items stimulates sense of identity and uniqueness of consumers as the majority lose interest in such products. Even though online shopping has become relatively prevalent today, a certain number of consumers are not inclined in shopping from online outlets, which makes online purchased in general, and online exclusive products in particular distinguished.

“There are brands that offer products that are not available from any other places.” – Natalie

“I am opt for products from last or previous seasons. Because they are outmoded, not so many will wear them in the near future.” – Tracy

“I shop online quite a lot, and not so many people whom I know shop online, so it turns out that I have quite many special items that others do not.” – Lacy

Choice of shopping venue. As mentioned in the previous section, unique and special products are likely to origin from unusual sources. In the context of online shopping, unusual shopping venue refers to online shops or platforms supporting trading of second-hand, as termed as, pre-loved or pre-worn clothes, and auction sites. According to Greer (2017) and Helbig (2018), fashion and apparel manufacturing is the second most polluting industries that causes harm to the environment. The awakening issue calls for conscious consumers to react to make a difference. In addition to acquiring garments with better quality that last longer, consuming pre-worn items is another solution to reduce waste. Besides the benefits of eco- and wallet-friendliness, second-hand items appear to promise the delivery of vintage fashion and value of uniqueness. According to Cassidy and Bennett (2012), acquiring pre-loved garments contributes to satisfaction of consumer NU while meeting their need for affordable fashion solution. Self-expression and distinctiveness are

achievable through the consumption of pre-loved items (DeLong et al., 2005; Tungate, 2008).

“There are second-hand stores online too. Tori.fi is an example. There are many stuff up for sale there, some are even weird, but if you spend enough time there you may find yourself a treasure.” – Taylor

“I once buy a second-hand dress from Ebay. I did not know that I can find such lovely piece of clothes from Ebay, especially when it is second-hand.” – Janice

Shopping from online auction sites is an alternative shopping venue for consumers who seek for unique products. Engagement in online auctions benefits consumers with a wider product variety including scarce and unusual garments at possible good deals through bidding practices (Lee et al., 2009).

“I shop from auction sites once in a while. They usually have special or limited items. You can get things at surprisingly cheap price. But of course it may be a little bit more expensive when it comes to limited items.” – Tracy

Similarly, avoiding fast fashion brands could increase the opportunity of finding and acquiring unique items. Since fast fashion successfully serves consumers with desires for affordable yet trendy garments (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010), it boosts demand for fast fashion brands. However, the over-consumption of mass-produced fast fashion causes deindividuation and inauthenticity (Hyunsook et al., 2013). Hence, a potential response to fast fashion could be the consumption of independent brands.

“I do not buy from fast fashion brands anymore. I prefer independent brands more lately.” – Haley

5.3.3. Avoidance of similarity

Rejection of influence tactics. Throughout the study, it is noticed that consumers with high NU score have stronger tendency to reject psychological tactics triggering shoppers to shop and spend more than their actual need. Concerning the performance of well-functioning marketing strategies on the majority of the consumers, the author strongly

believes that the number of identical purchase made on similar garments is relatively high. One of the identified triggers is promoting discount of certain items. Promotions are intriguing as it stimulates interest of price sensitive consumers towards discount products by suggesting that they are able to acquire the items at better prices, resulting in the increase amount of consumers purchases the products. That means the increase of number of people wearing similar items. Apparently, high NU consumers would like to avoid such incident.

“Clothes that are on sale are irresistible, but it also means that they are irresistible to other shoppers too. So I always try to avoid that section although it is pretty challenging.”
– **Annie**

“I am not going to buy on-sale items because I know there will be hundreds of people buying them already.” – **Taylor**

Another stimulation is suggesting scarcity of products by stating deadlines for sale or announcing out-of-stock impendence. Implied product scarcity establishes a sense of urgency (Aggarwal et al., 2011) and desirability among consumers urging consumers to take action immediately to avoid experience of anticipated regret (Swain et al., 2006) derives from missing good deals. In the brick-and-mortar setting, responses of consumers range from urgency to buy, in-store hoarding – the behaviour of developing desire for certain products and keeping the products for themselves while shopping (Byun and Sternquist, 2008), to in-store hiding – behaviour of keeping the products out of other shoppers’ sight (Gupta, 2013). However, online environment does not advocate such responses, especially in-store hoarding and hiding practices, except the urgency to make purchase. Hence, consumers stimulated by scarcity enticement are more likely to acquire the perceived scarce garments. By rejecting this tactic, consumers seeking differentness can avoid similarity to the mass.

“Stores like to trick us to buy stuff by showing that the products are running out of stock, or that the sales are going end in couple of hours. Believe me people are going to buy that. It is better for me to stay away from such bait.” – **Dennis**

Likewise, online outlets fascinate consumers to buy more by implementing cross-selling and suggestive selling strategies. It is rather typical to come across complementary products claiming to appreciate viewing items as a complete outfit. One of the most effective manners of cross selling is to convince shoppers to shop the look of featuring models, meaning that the shops offer accompanying garments or accessories wearing by the model in the picture. Another approach is using social proof utilising certain suggestive phrases, such as “customers who viewed this item also viewed” or “see what other people are watching”. This function shares similar impacts on consumers compared to promotion and product scarcity tactics. Under particular circumstances, the mentioned tactics together with those undefined in this paper cluster to generate greater outcomes.

“Online stores do cross-selling all the time by referring you to another product that seems to complement the item you are viewing. If they are showing that item to you, they will probably show it to other shoppers too. It took me sometimes to realise such fact, and since that day, I decided to never trust their suggestion again.” – Theodore

Discard of commonplace products. In order to prevent similarity to their peers, consumers with high uniqueness concern avoid using commonplace garments, or dispose of owned possessions as recognising the popularity of the items, the threat of being mimicked, or the perceived sense of uniqueness is violated. Meanwhile, consumers with lower concern with uniqueness express neutrality and/or indeed positive responses towards perceived similarity to other people as abovementioned. High NU consumers express strong tendency of interest deficit in the products and/or possession disposition when the threat of similarity heightens.

“I once noticed that someone was using the items that I also had, and then I immediately feel that I would not use them again, or maybe I would not use the items a lot anymore, or wear them to places where I may catch people’s attention.” – Taylor

“I tend to lose interest and get rid of something if it is owned by other people even though I really like it and it suits me well.” – Annie

For some consumers, the intimidation of deindividuation surfaces only when they encounter extreme similarity regarding the number of individuals wearing the items. Given

the consumption of an item, consumers are comfortable with being identical to a relatively small amount of other people, yet they would give up the item in case the quantity enlarges. However, similarity between consumers and related others or their peers have more powerful influence on the perceived intimidation of consumers.

“I have seen someone with the same jacket on the street, I just said like “Nice!”, and I am OK using that jacket again. But if I saw some more people using that then maybe I do not want to use it anymore. But if my friends have the same shirt then I would say “Let’s agree on what to wear beforehand, and let’s not have the same clothes again”. – Ian

In the context of online environment, possession disposal occurs under the form of selling garments on trading platforms, such as Tori or eBay, or social media networks, such as Facebook or Instagram. However, considering the convenience, popularity, and coverage level of Facebook, most of the consumers sell their undesired items on the platform. There are online communities supporting trading of products including fashion, household, and similar items, between their members. Commonly, the communities only serve customers located in the same geographical areas; hence, by joining these communities, consumers are able to have a look at the local second-hand fashion market while having opportunities to give new life to unwanted items. Additionally, Facebook as a social media network smoothen communication between buyers and sellers compared to other platforms where traders and purchasers have to contact each other through e-mail or SMS text. There are cases where consumers are unwilling to have their personal contact information published on the Internet, and then using Facebook could help as a means of communication.

“I tried selling my stuff on eBay and Tori once but it did not work out very well. Facebook is a lot easier.” – Janice

“Social media turns out to be a great way to get rid of your unwanted clothes. You can easily put them for sale and pass them to their new owners.” – Natalie

“I sold my unwanted items on Facebook sometimes ago. It is fast and easy.” – Tracy

5.3.4. Summary of consumer perception and manifestation of NU

Consumers motivated to engage in fashion consumption in the online environment exhibit different perspectives and behaviours to seek for and maintain their personality and uniqueness in accordance to their degree of NU. As discussed above, consumers with different perspective of uniqueness have different NU. Within the scope of this study, consumers are divided into groups of high, and low or mild NU, whose behaviours are studied respectively. Consumer behaviour as manifestation of NU consists of three main themes based on Tian et al.'s (2001) behavioural dimensions of CNFU. The following diagram demonstrates consumer NU manifestation in further details (Table 3).

Table 3. Summary of consumer perception and manifestation of NU

NU Perceptions/Manifestation		Description	Representative quotes
Perception of NU		Consumers with different NU degree have different perspectives of uniqueness.	<i>"I do not want to wear the same clothes as someone else."</i> – Ian <i>"I am more into comfortability...simple and elegant."</i> – Natalie
Creative choice	Personalisation	Personalisation and customisation have become more convenient online. Consumers are able to imprint their personal touch on desired garments to declare their personality and uniqueness.	<i>"Customising products is rather simple online."</i> – Dennis <i>"I am a bit sceptical on how people will think..."</i> – Annie
	Display of possessions	Display of possessions in online environment refers to the practices of sharing contents claiming the interest in and/or consumption of certain items to social media networks or platforms.	<i>"I share to my Instagram account things related to fashion, like, my outfit of the day, fashion tips I collect somewhere on the Internet, and stuff like that, that I think are nice."</i> – Janice
	Innovative	Updating fashion trends and styles is effortless online with the vast amount of accessible sources.	<i>"There are lots of sites update new fashion all the time."</i> – Haley <i>"I frequent many online stores...to see the new trends."</i> – Annie
Unpopular choice	Less common products	Avoiding "most popular" or "best-selling" section of online outlets or acquiring items from previous seasons help consumers to refrain from similarity to many other people.	<i>"I do not like to shop in the best-selling section. It gives away the items that tons of other people are wearing."</i> – Taylor <i>"I am opt for products from last or previous seasons."</i> – Tracy
	Shopping venue	Exploring uncommon shopping venue benefits consumers with options for special garments.	<i>"There are second-hand stores online too ...if you spend enough time there you may yourself a treasure."</i> – Taylor
Avoidance of similarity	Influence tactics	Online marketing influence tactics include promotion, suggestion of product scarcity and suggestive selling, which generate sales for retailers as well as similarity in fashion item consumption.	<i>"Clothes that are on sale are irresistible, but it also means that they are irresistible to other shoppers too."</i> – Annie
	Discard of common items	The convenience of platforms supporting trading between consumers ease the practices of disposing of unwanted possessions.	<i>"I sold my unwanted items on Facebook sometimes ago. It is fast and easy."</i> – Tracy

5.4. Re-evaluation of the theoretical framework

5.4.1. Consumer motivations for online fashion shopping

The interpretation of data gathered throughout the current research captures a brief view on motives driving consumers to engage in fashion shopping in online environment. Consumers recognise online shopping as a more convenient solution in terms of time-effectiveness, free from travelling, which provides them with better control and freedom. Online shopping also offers accessibility to a wider product variability and availability to consumers. Given that shopping from online retailers restricts consumers from experiencing the garments prior to the purchase, flexible return policy encourages consumers to make purchase online and return the unwanted items either at brick-and-mortars or via postal service. Consumers also find online shopping as a means for promotions and bargains hunting as the Internet eases the process of searching and comparing prices among brands and retailers. Finally yet importantly, shopping online provides consumers with possibilities to engage in shopping activities at their most comfortable state, without any interference of crowd store atmosphere, long queues to changing room or cashier, or undesired direct contact with either store personnel or other shoppers.

Readers might recognise that the study on motivations solely explains the underlying reasons of consumers' adoption of online shopping as a shopping alternative, and leaves the question of motivations driving consumers to engage in fashion shopping in general, and online fashion shopping in particular, unanswered. As abovementioned, the informative and accessible nature of online environment empowers consumers to effectively look for and obtain bargains or deals for fashion products. This motivation parallels with the value shopping motivation (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003) encouraging consumers to engage in fashion shopping. Other justifications for the topic surface and are discussed in the interpretation of consumers' consumption behaviour as manifestations of NU.

Driven by the above motivations, consumers adopt the online environment as a shopping channel, and exhibit assorted consumption behaviours in order to achieve and ensure their personal identities and uniqueness. In accordance with the formerly discussed themes, the author reviews, reflects and re-evaluates the proposed theoretical framework (Figure 7).

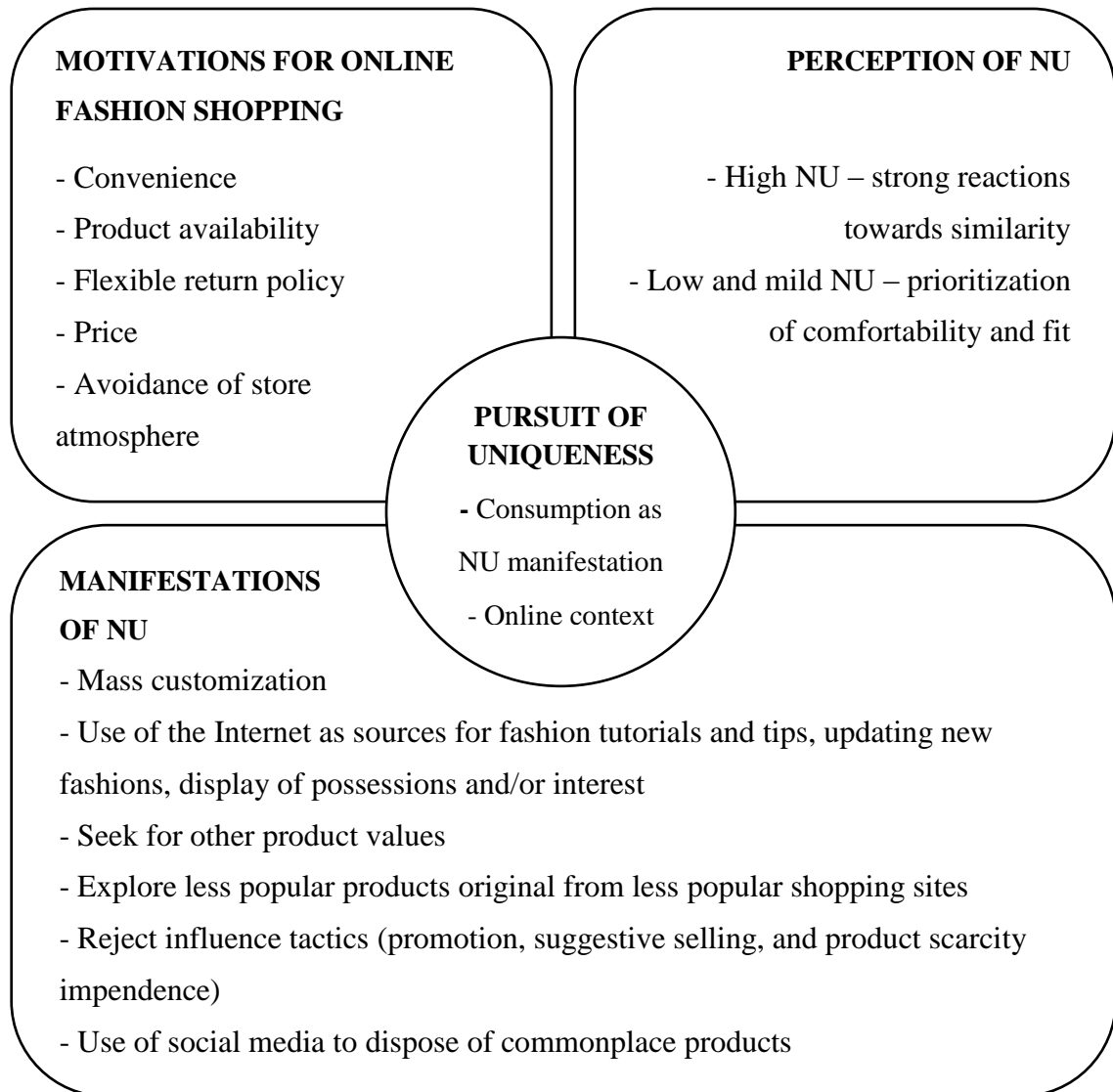


Figure 7. Re-evaluation of theoretical framework

5.4.2. Understanding perception and manifestation of high NU consumers

Throughout the interpretation of consumers' responses, it is confirmed that consumers with diversified perspectives of uniqueness perceive their NU variously. In parallel with Snyder and Fromkin's (1980) study, the current research capture the individual differences

in perception and manifestation of consumers of uniqueness definition and NU. Interpreted results illustrate the association connecting high concern with uniqueness, intensified impressions and reactions towards likeliness between consumers and others, and indifference to social opinion. Consumers with higher NU perceive uniqueness as a state of being outstanding and/or one-of-a-kind in a given setting achieved with non-conformity in fashion consumption. As long as consumers are comfortable with their choice of fashion, there is chance that they neglect objection and criticism of the society. However, consumers show consideration for the possibility of conflicting social norms when pursuing uniqueness, hence the emergence of limitations. It is crucial that consumers respect the context of attending happenings to meet certain dress codes and requirements and avoid potential social punishment.

Within the scope of this study, consumers with stronger NU achieve and ensure distinctiveness from their peers through the engagement in *creative choices* of fashion products in online environment. Driven by the NU, consumers strive for products that differentiate them from the mass carrying their personal touch coined in the product design. This explains the evolvement of mass customisation fulfilling consumer demands for, and acquisition of trendy and desirable yet unaffordable garments (Mulqueen, 2017; Barnes and Lea-Greenwood, 2006), whilst refraining from products from fast fashion industry. Empowered by technologies, mass customisation facilitates the purchase of personalised and/or customised fashion items at reasonable price when shopping online.

Display of possessions is another form of classification of distinctiveness. Consumers differentiate themselves from the majority through the interactional practices of exhibiting visual material products (Fisher and Price, 1992; Kleine and Kernan, 1991; Holt, 1995). Social media offers consumers accessibility to the most efficient means of communicating desired images to as many audiences as possible. By sharing content indicating the consumption of certain brands or garments to social media platforms, consumers deliver messages of their fashion taste and style, personality, and sense of uniqueness to their related others. Through the posts on social network, consumers convey their affiliation with and interest in particular brand names or product categories. Given that personal interests contribute to consumers' identities, publicly expressing interest towards certain brands or products enhances consumers' images and individuality.

According to Holt (1995), in addition to the use of objects to classify consumers' uniqueness, interactive experiences of consumers with fashion and fashion items contribute to their distinctiveness. Regardless the diversified practices consumers engage in the fashion world, requirement of relevance to the research context solely allows the study of consumers' innovativeness when adopting and staying up-to-date with new fashion. Keeping up with trends and styles, and adopting latest fashion help with consumers' NU especially when the majority has not yet accepted it (Lynn and Harris, 1997). Additionally, the involvement of consumers in different practices to keep up with new fashion can also be explained with the idea shopping motivation (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). Pursuing of understanding of new fashion is effortless online with the availability of numerous sources including publications and fashion-related websites. Consumers suggest that exploring new collections of online retailers also provide a concise view of current state of fashion industry.

In pursuance of prominence, consumers search for alternatives that are less favoured by the mass. In other words, consumers with high concern for uniqueness opt for *unpopular choices* to resist conformity. Aside from the indifferences towards social point of view on their fashion choice, consumers explain their fondness for uncommon garments with the disinterest of the majority of consumers, which makes the acquisition and consumption of such items distinguished. Consumers seeking for less popular items also give precedence to other utilitarian product values, such as, higher quality, material, and durability. It is claimed that uncommon and less popular garments are found and purchased from uncommon and less popular shopping venues.

Similar to shopping in offline environment, various shopping venue options are available online for consumers. Shopping from online thrift stores and auction sites benefits consumers with possibility to acquire unexpectedly interesting items at affordable costs. However, less popular items do not always means undesirable products under-appreciated by most of the consumers. It may implies garments exclusively available in certain foreign markets that are inaccessible locally. Since the items are unavailable in the local market, acquiring them online is more convenient.

Simultaneously, consumers pursue non-conformity through *avoidance of similarity* practices. Online retailers intrigue consumers with psychological marketing strategies,

including promotions, suggestive selling, product scarcity impendence, et cetera, to spend more while shopping and generate more profit for the business. For the reason that the influence tactics have impact on most of the consumers, it is possible that the amount of shoppers purchasing identical garments is relatively high. Respectively, consumers concerning the threat of similarity and uniqueness prefer to resist the influence. In the event that their uniqueness is jeopardised, consumers have high tendency to consider possession disposal. In the context of behaviour taken place in online environment, disposing of fashion items occurs mostly under the form of selling unwanted garments on social media or platforms supporting trading of products between users. Yet, it is noticeable that Facebook is the most favourite channel used for selling and purchasing pre-love garments.

5.4.3. Understanding perception and manifestation of low NU consumers

Consumers with low NU perceive uniqueness from a diverse perspective with a different priority. Fit – in terms of complementary to consumers' size, shape, and personalities, comfortability, and other functional values of fashion products determine consumers' consumption behaviour. Consumers discuss the significance of and connection between comfort of garments, and their fashion choice and consumption. It is believed that the enhancement of confidence and appearance derive from clothing comfort results in improved self-image and social image, thus uniqueness of consumers. According to a study of Spiegel (n.d.), comfortability is one of the determinant criteria considered when consuming fashion commodities. Surrounding context also have impact on consumers' choice of fashion. Besides, from the perspective of low NU consumers, similarities to others regarding fashion style and choice reflect the potential correspondence in tastes and personalities. Consumers have high tendency to exhibit responses that are more positive to similarities in comparison to consumer with higher uniqueness concern.

In the online environment, consumers with low concern for uniqueness assure their distinctive from slightly different approaches. Personalisation and customisation of garments are common among low NU consumers, yet in light of the fact that they are hesitant about excessive similarity to the mass, they express anxiety towards overdone modified products. Besides, consumers address personalisation and customisation as do-it-yourself projects and mix-and-match practices. Consumers suggest that they obtain

ideas for outfit and self-customisation of current items from browsing the Internet. Similar to high NU consumers, those with low concern for distinctiveness classify their identities through their posts on social media as well as updating new fashion using online publications and frequenting online retailers.

Regardless the sceptic towards unpopular choice of certain consumers, most of the consumers respond positively towards less common garments. In addition to products featuring additional traits, consumers refer to outmoded fashion items that are relinquished by the majority of typical trend followers. Low NU consumers as well mention their preference for online thrift shops and auction websites. Furthermore, refraining from fast fashion brands is another alternative to sustain consumers' uniqueness.

However, consumers with less concern for distinctiveness show low tendency to undertake rejection of influence tactics practices. Yet, they also consume social media and trading platforms as a channel to dispose of unwanted garments.

6. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this research is to gain comprehension on consumers' pursuit of uniqueness in fashion through consumption behaviour in online environment. In order to resolve the research purpose, the current study is fragmentised into three main themes seeking understanding of motives urging consumers to adopt the online environment as a consumption channel, perceptions of consumers of uniqueness and NU, and behaviours or tactics used to ensure the established distinctiveness of consumers. This chapter summarises the research purpose and research questions, and reviews whether the findings resolves the declared research questions. Within this section, the author also indicates potential contributions of the current study, as well as identifies any limitations encountered when conducting the research and possible directions for future research on the research phenomenon.

6.1. Pursuit of uniqueness through consumption

Given the traits and benefits delivered by the Internet, consumers perceive the online environment as a favourable shopping alternative. Motives urging consumers to prefer online over traditional shopping including its convenience, wide range of product availability and variety, flexible policies on exchange and return of purchase items, competitive price, and escapism from physical outlet settings. The encouragements emerging from the current research correspond to the motivations described in Sahney et al.'s (2014) multi-dimensional framework regarding consumers' motives to engage in online shopping. The study also apprehends the classifications of consumers' involvement in fashion shopping, comprising practical values of fashion items, idea-shopping motivation, and value-shopping motivation explained with the theory of utilitarian and hedonic motivations (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). However, the motivations for fashion shopping are not captured directly during the discussion regarding underlying stimulation of online fashion shopping. They surface when consumers interpret their reasons of uniqueness-seeking behaviours.

Because of the fact that consumers are different individually, their NU are diverse ranging from mild to extreme degree on a continuum. Within the scope of the current research, the degrees of NU of consumers are determined based on the author's interpretation of respondents' perception and manifestation of NU. Throughout the research, it is observable that the majority of studied consumers are aware of their NU and strongly exhibit consumption behaviours in accordance with their perception. Those with high concern for uniqueness express stronger opinions and attitudes towards similarity, and exhibit more regularly manifested behaviours to avoid conformity between themselves and others including related and unrelated selves. At the other end of the spectrum, consumers perceive uniqueness from another perspective where they prioritise functional values of garments, namely comfortability, quality, and fit in size, shape, and personality. Additionally, there are consumers with moderate NU who suggest resilience in their responses towards the sameness with other persons. In most of the cases, they express neutrality towards comparability in appearance; yet they actively seek for garments embracing their distinctiveness. In accordance with degree of NU, consumers exhibit manifestation of NU variously. To apprehend consumers' strategies and tactics of pursuing uniqueness holistically, the author suggests a framework designed upon the previous works of Tian et al. (2001), Holt (1995), and Lynn and Harris (1997). The framework consists of consumers' perception of uniqueness and NU, and three behavioural-dimensions, namely, creative choice and unpopular choice counter-conformity, and avoidance of similarity.

Firstly, the online environment offers consumers the creative alternatives to pursue their uniqueness. Consumers engaging in making creative choices demonstrate inclination towards personalising and customising garments prior to or after the purchase. Personalised and customised items carrying consumers' personalities are one-of-a-kind that might not belong to another person. Personalisation and customisation of fashion products occur prior to the product acquisition with the help of mass customisation technologies and online services offered by retailers. Consumers are able to have more control over the design of the garments and have their personal creative touches imprinted on the desired garments followed by home delivery. Personalisation and customisation also refer to the practices of transforming current fashion items using fascinating ideas and tutorials available across the Internet. From online sources, consumers can as well access to fashion tips and outfit inspirations. Additionally, driven by the need to keep up with the

transitory fashion trends and styles, consumers consume the Internet to learn about the movement of fashion industry and market through publications and fashion-related sources, and online retailers. Staying up-to-date does not always mean adopting new fashion, even though being early adopters of new trends enhance consumers' uniqueness in comparison to their peers. It is believed that possessing an appropriate amount of insights regarding fashion development differentiates consumers from the mass. Besides, consumers assert their uniqueness through displaying possessions and interest in certain brands or product categories on social networks. Exhibition of items, fashion trends and styles on social media platforms seems to assure the communication of consumers' desired images to a broader range of audience compared to the traditional approach.

Secondly, the online environment provides consumers seeking uniqueness with accessibility to less desirable choices. Unpopular alternatives include garments that are not widely adopted by the majority of consumers due to the use of certain unfavourable features, for instance, colours, materials, or additional details. As a matter of fact, the amount of consumers attracted to less favourable items are small, hence possessing such products differentiates consumers. Moreover, products being less popular in a market perhaps because they are excluded from the market for particular reasons. Similarly, acquiring and consuming the garments transfer the message of consumers' differentness. In addition, consumers ensure their pursuit of uniqueness by looking for other values, such as better quality or more sustainable materials, as well as refraining from products of fast fashion industry. Given that the product variety and availability are broader online, it facilitates consumers to explore the market and reach the potential decent options. Besides, the online environment provides consumers with approachability to garments limited to a few markets solely. Likewise, consumers also have access to pre-loved items sold in online thrift shops or platform supporting pre-used products trading. As the garments are perceived mostly as out-of-style and are disposed by the majority, consuming the items results in the increase of consumers' distinctiveness.

Lastly, the online environment presents alternates where consumers pursuing differentness perform practices to refrain from sameness. Considering that, online retailers use various strategies to generate sales, and/or discard slow moving products or previous season items. The tactics include holiday or seasonal promotions, suggestive selling of the look of models or products popular among other consumers, and product scarcity impendences

carried through deadlines for sales or stock-out threats. The psychological marketing strategies provoke the urgency to acquire the garments. As most of the tactics have influence on the majority of the consumers, resisting the enticement suggests differentiation from the mass. Under the circumstances of threatened uniqueness, disposal of possessions appears to be an attentive solution to maintain consumers' distinctiveness. Disposition of certain belongings executed in the online context takes the form of selling pre-loved garments on either social media or platforms specialized in trading between users. Respectively, consumers shop from online second-hand outlets for used-to-be-favourite items of others, and sell their undesired clothes there.

6.2. Contributions

The current research provides an improved understanding of consumer behaviours seeking for uniqueness through fashion consumption in the online context and the underlying explanations for their decisions. Considering that NU is a stable personality trait, it is apparent that target customers of fashion brands share the trait on different degrees. Additionally, the amount of consumers engaging in online shopping is growing regarding its convenience. Hence, it is critical for businesses to fulfil such need in order to retain their consumers, especially in the online environment. Following the research findings, there are three main suggestions for managerial implementation to better satisfy consumers' needs and demands.

To minimise consumers' shift from fast fashion to independent brands for better product quality and assuring of uniqueness, businesses operating in fast fashion industry may first introduce additional product lines or individual product brands targeting the particular market. Besides the main product lines, businesses may present lines of merchandise providing higher garment quality using better material with remarkable design. To avoid giving the sense of mass manufactured, it is potential to deliver greater product diversity or variability at lower availability. High quality product at limited availability suggests the impression of distinctiveness. Assuming that brands prefers to boost online sales, proposed product lines may be launched exclusively online.

Secondly, taking into account the increase in demand for customised items alongside with NU variable, fashion brands in general, and fast fashion businesses in particular, may consider the implementation of mass customisation technologies and of customising services. Customising services can be offered either online or offline to better serve consumers who need consultant from professionals.

Lastly, it is observable that there is a potential market for second-hand garments. Since the awareness of fashion as the second most polluting industry has risen and been discussed continuously, the need for sustainable and ethical fashion solutions accelerates. To fulfil this need of consumers as well as be more environmental responsible, fashion brands may collaborate with second-hand fashion businesses to recycle pre-owned garments. There is a known case of affiliation between Marimekko and We Started This (WST). WST collects used Marimekko items and puts them for sale on their online store. Other fashion businesses may adopt the idea to support a more sustainable fashion industry while providing their consumers with second-hand alternatives.

6.3. Research limitations and future research directions

The current study encounters three major limitations potentially influencing the research result. Based on the limitations described below, this section presents possible research directions in the future.

The first limitation emerges during the study is the short of accessibility to a wider range of age groups due to the requirements of experience in online shopping and familiarity to the online environment. The main reason for seeking for respondents from different age groups is to obtain a thorough understanding of uniqueness-seeking behaviours performed by consumers from various occupational backgrounds and income levels. The author strongly believes that consumers engaging in different professions with different financial status perceive uniqueness and NU differently, hence the diversity of manifestation of NU. Yet, the author failed to reach out to consumers from mid-30s with adequate experience with online shopping in particular, and the online environment in general, due to the insufficient network connection as well as time resource. For future study on the

phenomenon, it is recommended that researchers acquire contacts with more diversified respondent groups.

The second limitation encountered during the research is the insufficient comprehension of consumers' motivations for fashion shopping. As abovementioned, the explanation of the reasons for online fashion shopping derives from the combination of fundamentals driving consumers to shop for fashion products, and to adopt the Internet as a shopping channel. Yet the motives yielded from the research is established on the encouragement for online shopping mostly. Even though the inclinations for fashion shopping in particular surface during the discussion on the manifestation of NU, it is incapable of providing a holistic understanding on the underlying arguments of consumers when making purchase of a fashion product. Hence, it is suggested that future researches construct a well-establish interview questions to further explore reasons.

Lastly, the current research endure the limitation in credibility for determinant of consumers' degree of NU. Due to the short of time and preparation, the author does not conduct preliminary evaluation of consumers' degree of concern for uniqueness, and solely bases the assessment on respondents' perceptions. Although the missing of the pre-evaluation does not greatly affect the research result, as the research participants are well aware of their sense of uniqueness, the study might not provide a precise assumption of consumers' actual NU. In order to avoid such situation, it is proposed that future researches of the phenomenon adopt the uniqueness scale before conducting interviews with chosen respondents.

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